

A QUEER LITERARY JOURNAL

chroma

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A QUEER LITERARY JOURNAL **Chroma** Issue 7 - Winter 2008

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Letters to the editor are welcome. Please send them to the address above, or to editor@chromajournal.co.uk



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In the beginning was a plan. And the plan was to put together a bumper Translations Issue that would reflect as much queer writing as we could from around the world. To tackle this mammoth task we brought on board four commissioning editors who set out to source work from “everywhere.” Each editor took on vast geographical spaces. We had the world covered! The plan was ambitious and, really, a bit ridiculous (so much for camp hyperbole!), seeing as each issue only has about 50 pages, and seeing as there are close to 200 countries and 7000 languages in the world, and even if each country had just three queer writers or artists... well, you get the picture. So, what appears in this issue is representative of... what appears in this issue. Stories and poems have been translated especially for *Chroma* from Japanese, Greek, Slovenian, Bulgarian, French, and Polish, amongst other languages. We still have a way to go. Once you start imagining that in every country in the world there must be, say, at least 3 queer writers! it’s exciting to think how much more work is ahead of us. There’s still Abkhazia, Afghanistan, Akrotiri and Dhekelia, Åland Islands, Albania, Algeria, American Samoa, Andorra, Angola, Anguilla, Antigua, Argentina, Armenia, Aruba, Ascension Island, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Burkina Faso, Burma, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Cayman Islands, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Christmas Island, Cocos Islands, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d’Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic – and that’s just the ABC of it. We plan to keep bringing you prose, poetry, and artwork from queer writers and artists around the world. One issue at a time. Welcome to Issue 7.

Shaun Levin

Editor



#15

#46



05



#175



#193

Blind Trust seeks to propagate small circles of trust. The piece seeks to create a safe environment, which encourages individuals to be brave and to do something they would not normally do. It aims to replace vulnerability with confidence and with the ability to trust. Participants are asked to pose for nude, abstract Polaroid photographs in a private studio on the premises and become part of a temporary photography exhibit.
JCZ

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Mother Tongue

Nicole Brossard

from *Catching Darkness*
translated from the French by Olivia Heal

"The dark suspends everything. There is nothing that can, in the dark, become true." Alessandro Baricco*

I often look at the time on my watch. There, in the dial's deep luminous reaches, I happen upon the reflection of my eyes. Yesterday, something slid into my thoughts that has changed the course of time in such a way that I, for a reason that remains unknown to me, want to write a book, slowly, in a language that is not my own. A way of avoiding shortcuts in my mother tongue, or perhaps also of taking flight. Like a stranger, I want to plunge into the landscape of a provisional world where meaning repels meaning along the steps of my path. I also write this book so as not to be gentle and to see the horizon ignite.

I am everywhere that I am. I am here to understand and to elude. I have posed a distance between my mother tongue and reality. I eagerly try to imagine how pleasures and joys, fears and frights construct themselves in an unfamiliar language. I try above all to understand how, with a vertical body, it is possible to impale reality at the same speed as fiction. Then I let that gentle, ever gentle immensity heave its blue Nordic melancholy onto my shoulders, without collapsing.

Around me the vast kingdom of time-flowing-by forces me to coexist with words unknown and so harsh that I hesitate to articulate them; to speak that which one shelters is to devour cold the narrative of our sincere lives.

I constantly strain to cast life, luminous and fascinating bait, before me, then I rest motionless for days, amidst words and tombs of high night. This forces me, this urgent, vertiginous time, to listen to what I call a *maelstrom of dizziness changing the depth of grammar*. That's the way it is.

I will do what I must to understand, yet I will have to simplify down to the bone, to flaunt the darkness, embrace it, carve open its soul, in broad daylight, if I must.

Many before me have chosen to write in a language other than the one given to them in childhood. Each held by the wind, suspended above a fecund void, neither distanced nor returned to the land of the young child, vivid, vital, thirsting to name everything. The world is always ready to dress itself in our joys and our wounds in order to adorn its surroundings. This world is perhaps nameless, unwritten, just swallowed along the reel of time by a finite number of dawns and twilights parched of languor and reason.

The years have gone by and never have I felt the sombre settle into my day-to-day acts. Nothing in the depths of my thoughts suggested a darkening that was not isolated and minor. Then one day, scarcely visible in the landscape, a small mark of something nascent in the form of an amoeba, a dimming of the houses, the trees, of passers-by, women and their children. A feeling of threat and tenderness reunited, as when compiling a biography, or if holding the hand of someone you don't know. There is a blackness on the horizon, a surface that does not reflect light, a lifeless surface that flies out from the expanse into the volume of life as precious as the arms of a child, as the leaves of tall crimped trees, as the turquoise surface of the water at the foot of glaciers. In my language I have exhausted the vocabulary that would have permitted me to name this intriguing black that approaches: raven, raptor, feline, black of volcanic sand, of marble, of ink and soot, of leather, of cassock, of niqab, chador and of charred corpse. Now I am in need of other words for this darkness, born of nature and civilisation, which draws nearer.

I do still, when travelling, dream, but with smaller and smaller images, difficult to stake out, like miniatures composed of an incalculable number of unreadable letters, assembled on a flimsy surface as if a world were on the point of wiping itself out, but a world whose disappearance is unthinkable.

I am everywhere that I am. Today, a lot of words take flame in my dreams that do not relieve me from my

* from Alessandro Baricco's *Ocean Sea*. Trans. Alistair McEwan. Vintage Books, 2000.

mother tongue, nor from the other that is already at work, I know, to transform my thoughts, to make me more sombre than I am.

Something silent passes through me when I imagine the foreign language. Like that day when I arranged to meet a girlfriend in a restaurant where the meal was served and eaten in utter darkness. Closing one's eyes or opening them made no difference. Each of our words, each of our gestures drowned in an opaque and nameless black that I qualified nonetheless as friendly, as this black staged a new invention of space apt to renew the familiar reference points. A black that held no terror, it was part of a universe that had until now eluded my sensory experience. As with everyone, I had become accustomed to the half-

light of cities and believed it offered a joyful alternative to night. That day I had to learn to breathe deeply, to break down those little barriers of resistance which, habitually, shorten my breath and turn me into a creature puffing with longing and anguish.

No one searches for darkness, nor likes to see the weather shadow over. I know nothing of the black. It is here, sudden, like a feline that takes its place in daily superstitions. It is now up to me to go to it, to approach and probe its soul with the invisible part of mine that, since yesterday, has begun to take on a life in a foreign language. ■

First published as *La Capture du sombre*. Montréal: Leméac Editeur, 2007

Jacek Dehnel A Poor Christian Looks at the Peggy Sage Salon

translated from the Polish by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

From the opposite pavement all you can see is colour:
an intense splash of orange and coral-pink lighting
in shop-front display windows that date back to granite
arcades from a bygone era. It's two. Świętokrzyska,

an empty, matt-finish river of congealed basalt.

At a distance of two paces the black sign turns lilac:
MANICURE STYLIST TAROT From behind the letters
in the fleshy glow of lamplight the interior boldly
shines in its night-time order: hairdryers in their holsters,
tubes, cans of hairspray and lacquer full of gleaming extracts
of seaweed and jojoba, green tea and vanilla,
salt, healing mud and kaolin in see-through suspensions
of pure mountain spring water – all doubled in flawless
mirrors. The beautiful people in beautiful photos
(amid sunshine, wind and ocean) look so natural
that you almost fail to see them.

Nearby there's a theatre,
a bank and a church over the road, further down,
on the right and left, slightly set back. But here only
the warm, rose-coloured lamplight speaks to us so fondly:
*Enter here, those who suffer, and you'll lose your burden
of feeling weary, lonely, hurt, ugly and senile.*
And higher up, in the trembling glory of spots flashing
shines a mysterious neon sign of dedication
to some slim, alluring deities: MEN'S STYLIST FOR LADIES.

Warsaw, 10-12 January 2005

Nikolay Atanasov

Wolves

My mother wanted to show her
queer son how disgusting it is to suck cock.
She took the wooden pestle and stuck it in my mouth. I was 14.

Communion bread, wood, a rough heel,
balls, nipples, an ear – when you love someone,
every part of his body has the same sacred meaning.

As I was taking the pestle in my mouth,
I recognized for the first time the wolf standing against me –
the green irises with brown spots, the dark circles under the eyes,

the long nose, the streaks of grey hair
above the temples, the chill of the seeming calm,
before she leaps up, always unexpected, to tear your throat.

Inside the cage of the tidy kitchen
she was a rabid animal, the scientists say
wolves have a certain level of self-consciousness. She was shaking all over

with a rage she didn't understand,
she had never realized what kept tossing,
pushing and gnawing at her all her life. Her empty stare was a nightmare

but an unexpected revelation as well –
it was as if a thick window isolated us from each other
and her choking bark didn't come through, didn't hurt, had nothing to do with me.

I wanted to tell you all this, Krassi,
years after you fed me your gaping heart
and failed to release me from the trap of my wolf anatomy.

Вълци

Майка ми искаше да покаже на своя
обратен син колко е отвратително да лапаш кур.
Взе дървения чукан за чесън и ми го вкара в устата. Бях на 14.

Нафора, дърво, грапава пета,
топки, зърна, ухо – когато обичаш някого,
всяка част от тялото му има едно и също свято значение.

Air

Tomoyuki Hoshino

Translated from the Japanese by Brian Bergstrom

The flute played the quiet with its hoarse-throated cry. It was a song like wind allowing a flute to sculpt its contours, a Toru Takemitsu composition called “Air.” My chest tightened as its birdsong phrase repeated over and over. It felt like Tsubame had flown into my room and was whispering in my ear.

With “Air” playing on a loop in the background, I spread tissues across the floor beneath my desk chair, dropped my pants, and rubbed myself erect. Then I took the alcohol-wiped blade of my craft knife and pressed it carefully against my penis, gently pulling it along the skin. The cold came first, followed closely by sharp pain, and a light flow of blood began running toward the root. I wrapped the shaft in tissue paper. With my spit-wet finger I caressed the mouth of the wound. An involuntary cry of pain escaped me. The stopper that had blocked my throat like the pit of a plum worked itself free at last, and sadness surged up. My tears and cries seemed to have no end.

I don’t do it because it feels good. I do it because if I didn’t, I would lose any sense that I was still alive. It was a variation on the theme of the wrist cut, the penis cut. I have no desire to approach death, so I avoid my wrists. I want to approach a deeper, more fundamental loss, so I cut my penis. I can get as close as possible to the loss of Tsubame this way.

I say I lost him, but he didn’t die, we didn’t even have a falling out. Tsubame simply went along with his diplomat lover, Dr. Hiroda (as everyone called her), when she was transferred to Mexico. At the farewell party the two of them held at their home, Tsubame had told me lightheartedly, “Come visit us! We’ll have three spare rooms, you can stay for as long as you like. Any one of them is bigger than your entire apartment, Tsubasa!” But I had already reached my limit. I couldn’t stand this one-sided affair any longer. It was just that I couldn’t bring myself to end things when he was near. When he told me he was going to Mexico, I realized my chance had come. Seeing that I could no longer stand the situation I’d found myself in, destiny had lent its helping hand.

So I vowed never to go to Mexico, never to see

Tsubame again as long as I lived. And with this feeling filling me, I sang him a farewell song at his farewell party. It was “La Golondrina,” a song sung in Mexico at times of parting, which I’d memorized phonetically for the occasion. The song’s words expressed the following:

Are you leaving, where are you going, *golondrina*?
If you hurry so, you’ll tire,
Lose your way in the wind,
Have nowhere to rest your wings.

I’ll make you a nest near my bed,
You can weather the cold months there.

I am lost here too.
O Heaven! I cannot fly like you, *golondrina*.

Oh, my lovely *golondrina*, I hear your song,
And think of home, and weep.

I’d also recorded myself playing the flute, and I sang with the recording as accompaniment. As I sang, the thought that the words were a direct expression of my heart overwhelmed me, and I started to cry. And once I started, I couldn’t stop. No one knew of my decision. Tsubame remained ignorant of the confession I was singing to him as I mouthed the Spanish syllables of “La Golondrina.” So my song was received with a vague sort of generalized pensiveness, punctuated by a few women bursting into tears in sympathy with mine.

Tsubame praised my flute playing. He knew how hard I’d practiced to make the instrument my own.

The first time we ever did anything alone together was when I went with him to a memorial concert for Toru Takemitsu. Dr. Hiroda, who was originally supposed to have gone with him, had had something come up, so he asked me to go in her stead. I’d never heard the name “Toru Takemitsu” before, and I found contemporary classical music so boring that I was fighting to stave off sleepiness throughout the show. I even abstained from the wine offered during the interval.

Still, Tsubame saw through all my efforts, of course.

The concert ended with Takemitsu's posthumous work "Air," then the house lights came up. Tsubame hurriedly wiped tears from his eyes, saying softly, "I want that piece played at my funeral. It makes me feel like I wouldn't mind no longer being human."

Was the piece really that great? Spurred by this thought, I ran out and bought it on CD. Patrick Gallois was the flutist on the recording. Even though I didn't understand what made it so great, I listened to it over and over. And as I did, the Takemitsu-borne wind that Gallois played began to penetrate my flesh, to blow through my body. It was music, yet it wasn't. It fell somewhere between a natural breeze and a man-made breath. I felt as if by opening my body to this wind, I, too, could transcend my own humanity.

This must have been what Tsubame had meant, and I was filled with joy at my realization, and ran to tell him. And wouldn't you know, he ended up giving me a flute of my own as a present.

"It doesn't matter if you're bad at it. You understand the feeling, so I want you to play the wind," he told me, rather affectedly. Artists have a tendency to say pretentious things without a hint of irony. Tsubame was an unsuccessful artist who displayed all sorts of bric-a-brac painted in abstract colors, and who Dr. Hiroda, the daughter of a gallery owner and fifteen years his senior, discovered and later made her lover. To cut a long story short, I ended up meeting Tsubame because a close friend from middle school had a sister who was an editor for an art magazine, and we were introduced at a party at her house.

Truth be told, the flute he gave me was somewhat of a burden. But I gave it my all, because I knew it pleased him. I took lessons whenever I had a day off, and even during normal workdays I'd practice for an hour in the park early in the morning. I'd initially planned on mastering the phrase from "Air" that I liked so much, but this turned out to be much too distant a goal, seeing how I found myself occupied entirely with just "La Golondrina."

Listening to "Air" again now, I caressed the wounds cut into my penis, and as I blew on them, the pain seeping into my flesh, I felt the air rush through me. The wind blowing through my hollow core seemed to produce a hoarse-throated sound. I became a flute as the wind passed through me, and I played my own version of "Air." I thought of Tsubame, who'd crossed the sky and left me. He'd shown me the difference between him and me, flightless wing that I am, and yet he also made me feel what it was to be alive. I resisted the urge to cut myself again.

Layers of scars adorned my penis like the patterns carved by waves. When Misaki was about to go down on me the first time, she noticed them and pulled back. "What's that? Some kind of disease?" she asked. "Well, of a sort," I replied ruefully, "A dis-

ease of the heart."

"I didn't know you were into that kind of thing. You like it rough? I must not be enough for you!"

"You are more than enough for me. It's just when I'm alone, I end up hurting myself."

I told her the truth. I told her all about Tsubame, save for my pathetic feelings for him. But the explanation didn't ring true even to myself. I'd never fallen in love with a man, my seduction success rate with women averaged about sixty percent, and things with Misaki were going perfectly well, so I hadn't known what to make of my quickening heartbeat when I'd first met Tsubame. Did I simply respect a man so able to live life on his own terms? Was I just drawn to someone whose talents exceeded my own?

Tsubame was popular. With his svelte physique, his gentle voice and way of speaking, his meltingly sweet disposition, his guileless way of approaching things that fell outside his ken, he possessed an openness that put everyone at ease while concealing the sharpness of his true insights. These elements blended miraculously to produce a sultry allure that wafted from him almost palpably. Yet he was devoted to Dr. Hiroda exclusively. All others who crowded around remained firmly in their places as dear friends, nothing more. Myself included.

Yet I had the feeling that in his heart of hearts, I stuck out at least a little from the rest of these "dear friends." And regardless, I simply wanted to be near him. It didn't matter if it was just the two of us or not. It was happiness itself just to hear his voice speak his words, to have him laugh or be moved or get excited by mine. Our moods would melt into each other and become inextricably mixed. And then I would decide not to think about these feelings any further. I would shed my clothes and satisfy myself with Misaki.

But even so.... At long last, I confessed my secret feelings to Misaki. Her response was unexpected, or maybe I should say, old-fashioned. In short, she became a ball of fire ignited by jealousy and trust betrayed.

"What is this load of crap? The truth is you like your junk slapped around by some dominatrix, don't you? You get off when it hurts, right? So why don't I try biting you? I'll chew you up and spit you out, you animal, you monkey who walks like a man!"

As she said this, she actually tried to bite me. Naturally, we soon split up. The truth was, I was playing at being something I wasn't even more than Misaki guessed, so my fault in the matter was hardly trifling. But even so, I made use of Misaki's convenient misunderstanding.

My cuts scab over and the scars they leave after I peel them off overlap and build on each other, deforming my penis until it looks like it's ringed with rubber washers. I was running out of places for my craft knife to slice. I wanted proof that I was alive. I

wanted to remake myself into a form I could point to and say, “*That* is Tsubasa Tsutsui.” I imagined myself with a vagina, tracing the line coarsely referred to as the “ant trail” that runs from behind my balls to my anus with the point of the blade.

I felt as if I already had a vagina. What other explanation could there be for the sweet pain that overcomes me? It was simply buried beneath this thick wall of flesh. My body was hiding my vagina deep within itself. A vagina concealed a hollowness. I was a flute, I was hollow too, wind rushing through my empty core. If I could just split my flesh open, my hollowness could be exposed. I could just turn my flesh back on itself and voila! A vagina would appear! Just as Takemitsu sculpted the air by caressing its contours to make wind into music, I could make myself into an instrument just by cutting through the hymen obstructing my flute! And then I would be my true self at last, and living my life would regain its meaning.

Excited by these thoughts, I drove the cutter's blade hard into my perineum. Pain incomparable to any penis cut shot through me from my spine to the crown of my skull. This was my penis's root. It was more resilient than I'd imagined, and more sensitive. But to cut into it was to make the vagina cut. If I couldn't stand to do it, I'd never become my true self. The extent of the sacrifice gave value to the act's completion.

I pictured myself penetrating my own hole, exploring it with my fingers. Just imagining it, my body was gripped with agony. If I really did it, I suppose I'd pass out, ascend to heaven. Ascend. I'd rise like Tsubame up into the sky. We'd ride the wind and dance up there, together in the air.

Today it happened in a crowded train. A penis appeared at my crotch. It was so sudden it hurt. It pressed up against someone's thigh. I supposed there were a lot of men who did this, who molested their neighbours with an innocent look on their faces. I supposed that now I knew what it felt like to be one of them, however involuntarily.

Though no one else could tell that my penis was there. My penis wasn't real. It was invisible. I was just your run-of-the-mill woman, my body as feminine as anyone else's, except from time to time I felt a penis sprout from my crotch. It was only the feeling that sprouted, though, my physical body didn't change at all. I called it my air penis.

I don't really remember when it first appeared, but I do recall that sometime before I was old enough to go to school, I wet my pants trying to pee off the edge of a riverbank while standing up, even though no one had ever told me that was possible, and I ended up getting scolded by my parents. My parents had thought I'd simply lost control. I tried to explain

that the pee hadn't come out the hole I expected it to, but they didn't understand.

I was afflicted off and on with this illusory feeling ever since, and I began to worry about why this was happening to me as I neared puberty. I didn't otherwise feel like a boy, and I wasn't attracted to other girls. If only for this one little problem, I'd be able to wax lyrical about my girlhood like any other woman. My air penis held a certain sort of innocent sex appeal for me, and it began to interfere with my sexual development as a woman. This was because my hallucinatory penis was maturing right along with the rest of me.

It was about a year after I first started to get my period that one morning I awoke to the feeling that my lower body was swelled to its very limit. Thinking I just had to pee, I went into the bathroom. I'd already sat down on the toilet before I realized that it was really just the feeling of my air penis growing harder than it ever had before.

I'd already experienced the occasional erection before then. I found that if I just ignored them, they'd dissipate before too long, taking the air penis itself along with them. But this time it hurt, like a stake was being driven into my crotch. The pain was sweet, though. I put my hand on my air penis. A tingling kind of ache washed over me, making me dizzy. Before I knew it, I'd rubbed my air penis until I came.

After much painful consideration, I finally reached a conclusion on the matter I could live with. Say you were to lose your right arm for some reason. Even though there's no arm there any more, a phantom arm may sprout and replace it, and it can grab things just as before, or you can feel like you're writing with it, or biting its nails, or stroking your lover's skin; the phantom arm can itch or hurt or even feel pleasure. Even after years have passed and you've become accustomed to everyday life with one arm, you may still be bothered by this sort of phantom arm sprouting up from time to time.

This penis of mine was surely the same sort of thing. It was the remainder of something that used to be there but was removed. Maybe in a past life, a man driven by a desire to become something else cut off his own penis and, at that moment, gave birth to me.

Since reaching this conclusion, I became much more relaxed. Because my origins were different, it no longer mattered that I was developing differently to the other girls around me. I didn't know if I was really a man, or, since I may have been driven to cut off my own penis when I was a man, I was really a woman, or if I was really neither. I felt like a real woman most of the time, but when I started to think deeply about which gender I might truly be, I sometimes felt like a “counterfeit woman, hiding from the world.” Counterfeit yet real. But nevertheless, a woman.

With my relaxation came my first boyfriend. I

could even have sex normally. One morning, I opened my eyes and then took off my clothes, asking him, "Can you see my wee-wee?"

I'd woken up with an erection. Though it had almost nothing to do with sexual excitement, my air penis was hard.

"I see it, I see it," Masakazu replied, and he reached out and fondled my clitoris. Oh, for the — well, what could I do? What I really wanted was for him to feel my penis the way I did, to touch it and suck it and put it inside his arse, but this would have to suffice.

It was my personal idol. I couldn't see it, but I knew my air penis was real. It was like a ghost, something that was removed and should have disappeared yet didn't, as if it had unfinished business. What compelled it to appear, what excited its interest? I became increasingly intrigued by the shrouded origins and mysterious desires of my penis.

The temperature had risen to nearly 40 degrees. It was the hottest it'd been all summer. It seemed to me that the humidity in the staging area was making the heat twice as intense. Even so, the drag queens waiting for their turn to go, the people dressed like speed skaters covered in arabesque patterns, the bodybuilders displaying their bulked-up chests, the bearded men wrapped in leather and dripping with chains, the people made up to look like who knows what, the couples with their smiles so broad they looked close to bursting, all their energy seemed inexplicably high. The only one who seemed to give off any negative energy was me, my bashful, retiring bearing paradoxically making me feel all the more conspicuous and anxious.

I was attending the Tokyo Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade. I'd found out about this festival for sexual minorities on the internet after making a cursory search to see if I was alone in having an air penis. If I hadn't possessed such a thing, if I were just your average girl, I likely would have never encountered even the term "sexual minority" my whole life. I also found out for the first time that "heterosexual" was the term for those who weren't "homosexual." Of course, homosexuals weren't the only "sexual minorities" out there. There were those who liked both boys and girls, as well as countless other, more complex conjunctions of love and identity. And since that was true, it seemed natural that a girl with an air penis could find a place among these folks. At the very least, I figured I'd meet others who shared some of the realities of my existence, so I found myself wandering out to watch the parade.

A vehicle approached, covered with pink and white and rainbow-colored balloons, blaring club music loudly into the air. Beautiful men danced on its stage, showing off their toned bodies. A welcoming cry welled up from the crowd that lined the street, and

a crowd of musclebound men stripped to the waist flooded the street in the vehicle's wake. There was another vehicle covered with women wearing golden dresses like royalty, followed by a group of lesbians and then a group of serious-faced men and women brandishing placards and shouting slogans. All the participants exuded an aggressive, "I'm so-and-so and such-and-such, here I am!" sort of pride, and it was a bit much for me to take. I felt humiliated. "I have an air penis! I have genitals made of nothing! It might just be an hallucination! It's not even as real as a dildo! Never mind me, I'll leave now!"

Yet, as my loneliness increased, so did my desire to assert my presence, and before long I'd darted into the street and mixed into the lively crowd of men and women who trailed after the tail end of the parade with little self-consciousness. There seemed to be plenty of others who'd gotten wrapped up in the festivities and stepped off the sidewalk to join in even though they'd not officially registered as participants, so it seemed unlikely I'd be reprimanded for doing the same. And in fact, another young man jumped in and joined the group right after I had.

This young man seemed as uncomfortable as I was, walking along with his body hunched and his eyes fixed on the ground. It looked as if he'd come alone and was unsure whether he really belonged, so he'd watched from the sidelines until the urge to join in the parade became overwhelming and he found himself following me when I darted into the fray.

We seemed to be the only ones walking lonely and unaccompanied within the group. Telling myself that this was a festival, that the sky was clear and cloudless, I approached the young man and said, "You didn't come with your boyfriend?" The man looked shocked and gave me a hateful look, shooting back, "And what about you? Your girlfriend dump you?" I was unsure how to respond for a moment, but then concluded that although I was there to assert my existence and pride, the worst thing to do would be to pretend to be a lesbian, and so I said, "My boyfriend doesn't share my opinion on these issues." The man's face twisted, and he snorted a laugh. Perhaps thinking that this was too rude a response, he added, "So, you joined the parade out of a sense of justice, because you oppose discrimination?" He was looking at my wrist as he spoke. There was a rainbow-colored bracelet hanging from it. In an attempt to get into the spirit of things, I'd bought it from one of the booths that lined the parade route. I didn't really understand what the English words ACT AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA written on it meant exactly, but I figured I'd fit in better with these colors on my body somewhere.

"You saw me run into the street from the sidewalk, didn't you?"

He nodded, muttering his assent. He seemed to realize that he'd followed my lead because he'd sensed

a discomfort in my actions that resembled his own.

"Well, we all have our reasons. I guess we all came here because no one understands us, no one sympathizes with our situations. I wouldn't say I've found a place to call home, but it did seem like I might not feel so ashamed if I came here," he explained with sudden gentleness.

A list of possible "reasons" scrolled across the back of my mind, but it occurred to me that it might be precisely because his fit none of them that he found himself in search of "a place to call home." His sense of shame once he got here might be due to his not being gay exactly.

"I'm sorry for earlier, saying 'boyfriend' without thinking."

This at last brought a smile to his face, though a dark one, and he said, "That's okay. After all, he was never really my boyfriend."

His words sounded a chord within me, played a beautiful melody. My air penis appeared. I suddenly got the feeling that maybe this was someone who would actually be able to see it. My whole body finally became suffused with a heat appropriate to my surroundings. Energy began to pulse outward from inside me, igniting my flesh. Turning my newly heated gaze on him once more, he appeared translucent. It seemed as though if my inner furnace got any hotter, he might start to shimmer and eventually disappear altogether. He seemed like a man whose body was bound to the earth solely by the density of his emotions, whose borders were only vaguely defined. I found myself on the verge of reaching out and touching his uncertain skin. I wanted to embrace him, even if it meant embracing a cloud. Suppressing this urge, I said, "There seems to be an afterparty. Do you want to go with me?"

At the gay club in Shinjuku Ni-chome where the afterparty took place, we gave ourselves over to the movement of our bodies and danced all night. Tsubasa seemed unused to this kind of place, his native uncertainty becoming even more pronounced, but nonetheless he seemed to make the best of it as he put his body through its paces.

I'd figured that the afterparty was to go on all night, so it didn't surprise me much when at around four in the morning, this woman who said her name was Hina told me with flushed cheeks that she was exhausted and then said, "My house is close by, do you want to come over?" All I really wanted was to talk with her somewhere intimate, just the two of us, so I didn't really care whether we went to her house or somewhere else, but in order to capitalize on the heat we'd unearthed during our conversation in the parade, it seemed like now, with our emotions and endurance peaking, it was the right time for liftoff.

As soon as we entered her fifth-floor apartment,

Hina opened the windows. The air that had been trapped in the room started to exchange with the comparatively cool air from outside. The summer sky was already starting to brighten with the coming dawn, and we could hear songbirds singing noisily. "I don't have an air conditioner, sorry," she said, turning on a fan instead. We crouched together in front of it. "It's so ho - ot," said Hina, and took her clothes off quickly, becoming completely naked. Taken aback, I just looked at her, and then she asked, "Do you see it?" while spreading her legs. She didn't seem to be propositioning me, but rather to be pointing at something. All I saw there was what I'd been imagining as I made my vagina cuts, just a set of normal female genitals. But I intuited that telling her that would disappoint her, so instead I just looked into her eyes.

"So you don't see it either?"

Hina muttered this to herself, her voice and expression deeply disheartened, as if her very existence had just been refuted. A certain note of self-deprecation was in her words, and I felt myself stirred by a tender sort of pity. "Can I touch it?" I asked, reaching my hand out. Hina nodded absently.

Not knowing quite what it was I was supposed to be touching, I started aimlessly caressing the area around her vagina. And then I suddenly withdrew my hand. What was that?

My body responded to his touch like a plucked string. He really touched it! I grabbed Tsubasa's hand and forced him to touch it again. His hand was fearful, pulling back against me fairly forcefully, but his fingers were curious. They slowly traced the contours of the air penis. Experiencing the touch of another for the first time, it unfurled like time-elapse footage of a sprouting plant, erecting quickly to quivering stiffness. Startled once more, Tsubasa withdrew his fingers. This time I made him grip it with his whole hand. As I did, my body convulsed with a pleasure I'd never known before. I moaned involuntarily. I communicated my desire to him with my eyes.

But I didn't respond to her right away. After all, there were things I wanted her to know about me, too. Impatiently stripping off my clothes, I exposed my crotch to her, asking as I pulled my bothersome penis out of the way, "Can you see it?"

There were countless scars there. Some places were swollen like welts, others were covered with raw, red scabs that looked about to spurt blood if peeled loose. Tsubasa was obviously not showing me these. He wanted me to see something invisible. Not see it exactly, but know it was there. I tentatively brought my fingers close. And then, in the area where the wounds seemed most concentrated, I touched him. Tsubasa, like me, responded convulsively. In a tense, high-pitched voice, he said, "That's where I open up. Do you see?" I nodded. I lay on my

stomach and licked him there. Just as Masakazu did to me, I caressed the tip of Tsubasa's real penis as if it were a clitoris. Tsubasa cried out hoarsely. The place I was licking soon became wet with something other than just saliva. Tsubasa's vagina opened its red flesh walls to me and I pushed my tongue farther in. The smell grew thicker. Tears ran freely from Tsubasa's eyes.

Unable to control my passion, I opened my body as my emotions overflowed. Hina breathed into my invisible vagina. Her breath blew through my hollow core and past all the other holes opening up all over my body, etching musical scales into the air. My music began to play. And as it did, I put Hina's invisible penis, which I had been gripping the whole time, into my mouth. She made a sound like the song of a rare tropical bird.

Her penis was like a rod of mochi skewered on a chopstick. It filled my mouth and made me start to choke, so I pulled my mouth away. I decided to nibble its side instead. Like playing a flute. I was playing Hina. I put the head in my mouth and worked my tongue and teeth like it was the reed of a clarinet. My eyes shed sparks in response to his touch, and I sang out, "Oh, oh, no, oh, no!" I raised my body up and made Tsubasa lay face up. Hina looked down at me from above. Her eyes saw me as I really was. Not as some person shaped approximately like any other man, but as I was, a body that produced sound when wind blew through it, an existence so faint it seemed about to disappear, yet still persists: she caressed the real Tsubasa Tsutsui. Tsubasa, who held me as I was, who needed no terms or labels, not gay or lesbian, not man or woman, not any of the myriad other ways I could be categorized: Tsubasa held me, accepted the air penis that made me unlike anyone else, as if I was just another person, just like everyone else. Tsubame had entered my heart and together we'd taken flight, yet alone I'd crashed back down, I couldn't fly alone, but now I'd found Hina, who understood my vagina's wish to be opened, who made my spirit soar, and tenderness for this Hina gushed up from within me like oil from a well as our bodies of air fit together, melded, saturating me with happiness, and sadness, too.

Tsubasa was getting wetter and wetter, and so, as I gazed into his eyes, I plunged my air penis into his air vagina.

Hina's still-swelling air penis continued to grow, and Tsubasa's newly opened vagina was still quite narrow, so they came quickly, releasing cries like rushes of wind from their mouths. Hina's voice sounded to Tsubasa like the cry of a raptor at the moment it fixes on its prey. Tsubasa's voice burned into Hina's ear like the squeal of a flute blown suddenly and too hard. As her air penis drove further and further into his air vagina, Tsubasa heard an unearthly wind blow through the conjoined hollowness they

formed as the circuit between them closed, and his chest swelled with simple joy at the thought that the duet this wind carried might travel all the way to reach Tsubame's ears. As the air vagina engulfed the air penis, the heat melted their doubled flutes into each other and produced a dazzling brightness. Tsubasa grew completely transparent as Hina looked at him through the nearly blinding light, and to Tsubasa, Hina's entire body was transforming into one huge invisible penis.

As the two winds sounded their unbearably high-pitched notes in unison, their melting, liquid bodies vaporized completely, billowing out the window into the boundless sky outside to evaporate into thin air. A breeze blew through the empty room, ruffling the curtains as it passed. The first golden rays of the morning sun fell across the tatami matted floor. Even now, the intermingled sounds of the dual wind continue to play their hoarse-throated "Air." ■

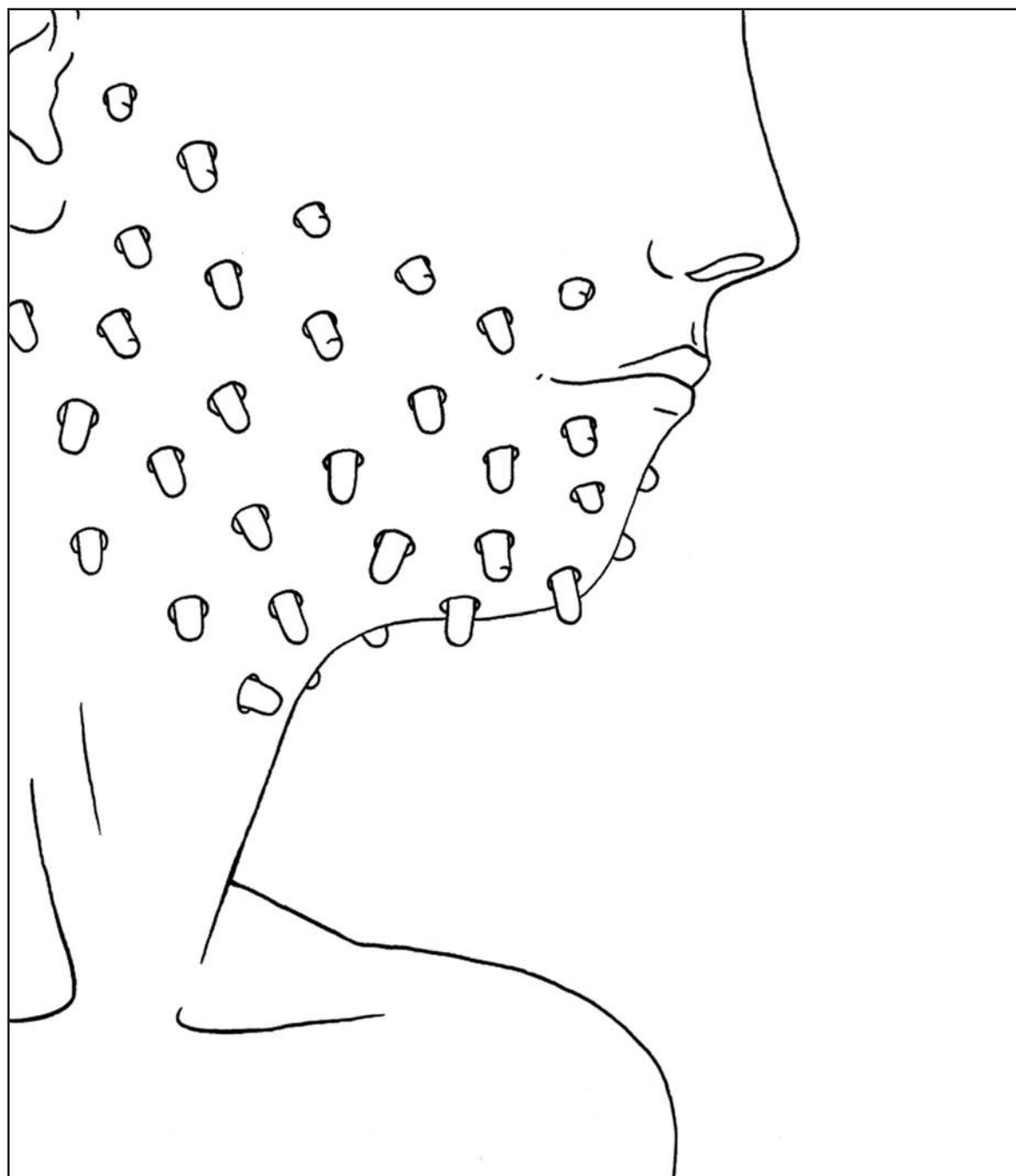
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フルートがかすれた音で、静かさを奏でている。空気をその濃淡に逆らわずに彫刻して形にしたような、武満徹の「エア」という曲。何度も現れる鳥のさえずりのようなフレーズを耳にするたび、ぼくの胸は締めつけられる。つばめが飛び跳ね、耳元で囁いているように感じられるからだ。

リピート再生にした「エア」を背景に、ぼくはデスクのチェアにティッシュを敷きつめ、パンツを脱いでペニスを勃起させる。そして、アルコールで刃先を拭いたカッターナイフを慎重にペニスにあて、弱い力で引く。冷たさが走り、次に鋭い痛みが後を追って、かすかに血がペニスの根もとへと流れていく。ぼくはティッシュでペニスをくるむ。指に唾液をつけて、傷口をこする。痛み、思わずうめき声を上げる。のどもとで梅干しの種のような固い栓が外れ、抑えられていた悲しみが一気にこみ上げてくる。ぼくの涙と鳴咽は、もはや止めようがない。

気持ちがいいからしているのではない。この痛みを感じないと、ぼくはもはや生きている実感が得られないのだ。リストカットの変奏、ペニスカット。死に近づいてみたいわけじゃないから、手首は切らない。もっと根本的なものの喪失に近づきたいから、ペニスを切る。それがつばめを失った喪失感に一番近いと思うから。



15

The Revolution

Lotte Inuk

from the novel *Ice Age*
translated from the Danish by Thomas E. Kennedy

My music teacher, Nukâraq Enoksen's daughter, Susanna, is by far the best-looking girl in town. The teacher plays bass and writes lyrics for a band whose songs we all know and can sing along to, even if we belong to that part of the population that doesn't understand the words, and his band, unlike, for example, Sumé, doesn't print a translation of the songs next to the original lyrics on the back of the album cover.

Susanna's hair is thick and sleek and black as coal, almost violet in a certain light. She has long, strong legs and carries herself like a queen, and at dusk she likes to strut around on the narrow colourful footbridges of painted wood between the city's split grey concrete housing blocks with a green-eyed cat on her shoulder; I don't know why or where to. Sometimes she listens to her Walkman, the cat doesn't seem to notice it or anything else, it just sits there, matching her wild look. She doesn't seem to notice you when you walk by, which is too bad, and even without the obstacle of the music, she isn't the type you'd think of just going up to talk to. Every boy, without exception, must be completely wild about Susanna, but she doesn't seem interested in contacting them or impressing them, and, strangely enough, they neither rush nor follow her around the way they usually do in Nuuk when such striking beauty is combined with such a lofty attitude.

Maybe she's just too beautiful, too mysterious, maybe you get the impression she could be a little crazy. Maybe it has to do with the cat, it gives the sense of a witch and danger and magic. It just sits on her shoulder like a guardian angel in the form of a tiger and never runs off and is content with its place. That's maybe what I envy most about Susanna Enoksen.

The Danish boys in town you don't even notice, they could just as well not exist. Here there are Greenland girls, and Danish girls, and Greenland boys. Some Greenland boys only go for Greenland girls, others go for the Danish girls, as well. To win their hearts and their coveted glances you have to try to act as Greenlandic, as tough and cool and streetwise as pos-

sible; you have to eat Greenlandic food and play without fear anywhere in the mountains and all the way down on the ice and not be afraid of anything; not even the Greenland girls who hate you and gang up outside your street door to mock you and grab you and slap you if you get too popular, even with one single boy in their class, no matter how uncool he might seem to you, or to them.

Malou and I dream about having black, thick, sleek hair and speaking fluent Greenlandic, just like that, so no one will have the slightest doubt about where we really come from anymore.

Malou's father divorced her mother in Denmark because of a Greenland woman not that much older than we are, and moved here to the city for her sake with Malou. Malou's little brother stayed with their mother in Jutland. So, in a sense, Malou is half Greenlandic and can even pass for a Greenland girl if she's careful with her accent and nobody knows too much about her; there are quite a few half-Greenlandic children and even some completely Greenland ones who can't speak a word of the language anyway, and also a lot with hair the same light brown as Malou's and eyes that don't look very different. I envy her that; with my own yellowish hair and unmistakably grey-blue eyes, it's harder to fake it, even if my mother, thank god, is seeing more and more of this gorgeous, completely cool Greenland boyfriend who's younger than she is.

Anyway, in winter my hair gets darker and Malou and I eagerly compare colour, count the black strands among the lighter ones and feel that it's going in the right direction, and we go without washing our hair for as long as possible because it seems darker then, and we practice the slang the girls in our class use as well as the unusual way they pronounce certain Danish words.

The Greenland boys are so beautiful. How could the pale, bloodless, clumsy, faint-hearted boys in our own class, sons of out-stationed librarians and bird watchers and maths teachers and scout leaders and pencil

pushers ever measure up to them? They don't even try, they already know they're only here for a limited time anyway, and it's just not worth it to take up the challenge. They'll soon be home again, in their own territory, where they can use language or intellect or their family names to elbow their way forward.

The guys who sit half-naked in the dormitory's open windows in the evenings when you're walking home on the walkways below have strong, light-brown chests, polar bear amulets carved from whale's tooth on black leather cords tight around their necks and Indian hair shining blue and hanging halfway down their broad backs. They look like captured warriors, sorrowful dreamers in the orange-gold evening sun. They whistle at you with child-like enthusiasm so your diaphragm twitches with longing. Their voices are disturbingly dark and soft and come from beautifully bowed mouths you know would taste good and salty as the sea, like the smell of those small dried fish from their thick sweaters when you lean your head against their shoulders at the movies or happen to bump against them on a rocking, crowded city bus.

When they're out walking the streets, they have their hands dug into the pockets of their leather jackets and skate elegantly, invincibly over the icy ground in slick cold rubber soles, hunching their shoulders and looking down at the ground and their breath steams and they send a slanted sharp glance full of unconcealed desire and sweet recognition when you walk past, all the while watching yourself that you don't stumble like some cow on the treacherous rock.

You have the idea these boys would fight and die for you, like in a fairytale or a romance magazine. You lose yourself in your childhood dreams of noble wild men or brave martyrs, dramatically dead, much too young, from courageous battles in mysterious jungles on distant, suffering continents.

I never imagined boys could be so beautiful! So shameless and purely fascinating, so uninhibitedly attractive, simultaneously so heartbreakingly gentle and dangerously raw and violent. If only I had the same blood running in my veins, if only I knew what these boys knew, thought and felt! If I could wake up one morning and speak their language, know their history, decipher their codes. If *those* hairs which are growing against my will and all too fast could be just as coal black and sleek and fine as the Greenland girls in the showers during gym class.

What raw beauty and perfection!

Exactly what a human being should look like.

Miki says that when the revolution comes I'll be thrown out, sent straight back to where I came from, I'll have no chance to stay here or ever return for a visit. I know that he wants me to stay, he talks as though even he doesn't believe any such revolution

will happen. But I think it will, and I hope so with all my heart.

"What if we get married?" I ask.

"If we get married and have a baby," Miki tells me. "The child would be allowed to stay. Our child would be a pure native."

Not even my schoolmates and best friends, Martin and Nico, who were both born and raised here with no connection to their family's original Scandinavian homelands, would ever be considered pure natives or equal citizens of the proud pure kingdom that will rise up on this mighty island after the revolution. It seems that to be considered a native or a citizen is not based on anything concrete or on any definite fact or at least not on that alone – it seems to be something more abstract.

The Danes or Faroese and other illegitimate changelings, who've not voluntarily left by the time of the revolution, will be promptly deported, Miki claims, with a bullet in the head.

"Will you fight for my life?" I ask, my heart beating wildly at the thought of such a serious and decisive revolt. "Do you think we could dye my hair?"

He laughs. "It would never look like a Greenlander's, no matter what you do with it! And our child would be a poor bastard, think about that."

"Like the two of us," I say.

"Speak for yourself," he says.

The bastards are the most beautiful, here and everywhere else: That black hair, those light eyes, or the other way round. Those long, powerful limbs. That warm complexion. All the best salvaged from both fallen worlds, a new beginning, a Phoenix rising from the ashes, a whole new breed of human being.

Miki says these are racist thoughts. He plucks the word out of the blue, suddenly, neither of us has really thought about it before, even considered its existence: Racist. It's racist to think that bastards are more beautiful than pure-bloods, to have such a preference.

But I still love the bastards of this world, maybe it's an innate preference, there from conception: My father was married, but not to my mother; my mother, when she's in that kind of angry mood, claims that that precisely is my grandmother's tragedy, the cross she must bear. But even if I don't doubt that it must have been a terrible, shameful history for her, and she doesn't hesitate to remind me constantly either, though not in so many words, I still know for sure that it can't be so, that despite everything, this can't be the only reason. ■

Originally published.....

Flight

Rachid O.

from *The Breathless Child*
translated from the French by Sophie Lewis

It was a summer when I was six. We moved out of our house so it could be cleaned, repainted, completely redone; we went to a neighbourhood far away, where a friend of my father lent him a house. It was fun to change houses, quite exciting. We had a garden, we were never homesick. There were hardly any other children, I didn't know anyone, and the neighbours across the road were two girls, one must have been about thirty and her little fourteen-year-old sister, who was really sweet. We became friends right away. Their parents were divorced, the Algerian father had stayed in Algeria and the mother was working at the Moroccan Embassy in France. The grandparents kept an eye on the girls but they lived by themselves, just the two of them. They were rich, always had money, a maid who lived with them. From the day after we arrived I never left her side, the younger one, we were together all the time.

There were two giant eucalyptuses at her place with a swing hitched up between them. It made an arch, we put mats on top to make it comfortable and played up there. It was the long summer holidays, we could be together from morning to night, and especially in the afternoons. There were some girlfriends of hers there, too, but it was her I liked to be with, I didn't care about the others. Her name was Saloua and everyone made fun of me at home in the evenings because they thought I'd fallen in love with her. They called me "Saloua" to tease me, to remind me she was my girlfriend. She was special, a really pretty girl with long hair. Often, in the afternoons in her bedroom, in front of the big mirror on her wardrobe, she'd try on different clothes. She loved her hair.

It was the first time I dressed up as a girl. She put my hair in pigtails because I had long hair, and she put lipstick on me so she could lick it off. There was nothing sexual. I never thought that she just wanted to show off her body to me. When we got changed it was normal, like two boys or two girls playing. She didn't try to make us have sex; besides, I was too young for her. My father was pleased that I kept myself occupied, he was fine about it, he was like a

mother hen. He was just happy that I was with people and having fun.

My family were fond of the two girls. The sister became friends with my sister and my brother fancied the younger one, really liked her, I could see. He was quite hard on me (because I was spoiled by everyone, most of all by my father), so hard that in the end he became my enemy. When I realised that he liked her, I notice he was nicer to me, that he wanted to talk to me about her so I could set up a time for them to be together, but I couldn't. He knew I knew, I'm certain about that.

The girls were good friends of my father's friend who was lending us this house, they used to tell us all kinds of stories about the people who'd lived there before us. Before she got out of her marriage, my father's friend's sister used to live there and in the end was killed by one of her brothers who cut off her feet with a sickle – she was a woman who had affairs all over the place. My grandmother was there the evening they told us that story and she was frightened. When she got up in the morning, she had to call the *fqihs* in, religious men who read the Qu'ran, "so that the little one doesn't have bad dreams at night," she said. She even went so far as to cut the throat of a baby lamb she'd bought and share it with the poor people. In our tradition, you must put blood on the threshold of a new house in order to chase away the evil spirits, and you must give dates and milk to the poor.

My friend never spoke to her parents, she didn't like talking. Every time I asked her a question, she'd say: "I don't give a fuck about my family." Everything I knew was what we learnt from her sister over a dinner at our house. They were sent lots of money by their mother, but it was Saloua who told me that bit. One evening, she said: "Do you want to go to the beach together?" I wasn't allowed to go alone because I was too young, and my family weren't the kind who spent days at the seaside. In the morning I met her again as usual, she was clean and had her hair all combed. I asked her: "Where are you going?" She said: "We're going together, to the beach, go and get ready." I was stunned, I thought it was going to be

with her and her sister. It hadn't crossed my mind that she'd think of going just the two of us. I went back inside; only my grandmother, my mother's mother, was there. I told her I was going next door, that I'd be back later, that we were going to play with some people from another part of town. She told me to be home by noon at the latest, otherwise they'd eat without me. We left the neighbourhood, we took a taxi, I had no idea that I was leaving for a couple of days, over night.

When I realised how far we'd gone, she said: "We're not going back tonight." I wasn't the least bit scared, I laughed, I liked the idea of going away with this girl. She was mad, she was, completely. I loved how she had freckles on her face, she wasn't dark-skinned. And, to begin with, she said: "We have to buy bathing suits." She said: "We must buy colours you can see from far away, so we can find each other if we get lost on the beach." I picked a red bathing suit that I liked a lot. She had a shrewd look on her face, I don't know if they were surprised in the shop to see us buying bathing suits, just the two of us on our own. She was smart, always ready to handle everything. Those girls were used to looking out for themselves. We bought a leather backpack. I refused to put my bathing suit inside because it stank of leather. We bought sandwiches. There was far too much for us, all the food we bought.

We went to a popular beach in Rabat. There was a pier with rocks and on the far side a stretch of sand with much bigger waves where people said it was dangerous, a beach where rich people went. She chose this one, saying she knew how to swim and wasn't frightened of the waves. She did know how to swim, I saw her, but I didn't want to go swimming, I was scared of the water and luckily I didn't do anything stupid, didn't try to go in. The water terrified me. All my life, whenever I bathe at the hammam, when they wash my hair, if they're not careful to pour the water over me gently, I get scared.

But I liked watching her swim. People stared at her because she was beautiful, and the pair of us attracted attention, I was brown and she didn't look Moroccan, so what on earth were we doing on a beach together? One time I lost sight of her. I didn't worry because I'd made friends with a boy and a girl, a brother and sister with their mother close by. Saloua hadn't come back, so I suggested they have lunch with me. The three of us had trouble convincing their mother to let us have lunch together, so I enjoyed making sure there was nothing left for Saloua, after she'd left me on my own. When she came back we were giggling because we were talking about how there'd be nothing left when she came back. And then she announces: "Sorry I'm a bit late, but I've already had lunch." She'd come back to tell me to get dressed and pack my things, we were going

to visit some friends she'd met. I asked her if we'd come again tomorrow to see the brother and sister, but she didn't know.

We crossed the beach, stepping over people, and came to a tent where there seemed to be just boys. The guy she introduced me to was black. She introduced him as a cousin of hers. We stayed with them for a while, for the rest of the afternoon. Towards evening we went back to this guy's place. I don't know what she'd told him about us, I didn't even give it a thought. We climbed into his car in the parking lot and he said: "You'll have to put your clothes on." We were still in our bathing suits. I loved wearing my red bathing suit. The car was a Renault 5. We drove across town, came to a huge gate with a fortified wall, I didn't understand where we were, it was the Mechouar, the royal compound of Rabat, with a long elegant boulevard. The main thing that struck us was that there were so many more black people than white. She asked: "Why are there so many Blacks?" He said: "Because at the turn of the century these were the slave quarters." She said to me afterwards: "Now I understand why we had to be properly dressed to come in the car." I loved how she looked when she said that, she was so extravagant in her bathing suit and her long hair.

We parked the car and walked along the path towards the villa. It was the most luxurious part of the Mechouar, high up, facing the Royal Palace. Everything was gold inside, huge, couches everywhere, gilded decorations, room after room. At the time I probably didn't think it was beautiful, just strange, it was like walking into a treasure-house. We both went straight to the kitchen to look in the fridge, and while we ate, the guy went into the bathroom. A moment later, he came back – huge, tall, square-shouldered – walked out of the bathroom wearing a *gandoura*, a big traditional gown, smelling of perfume, and I noticed a gold chain that he hadn't been wearing at the beach, with its medallion engraved with the word "Allah," and a key and crown that looked like royal insignia. I was fascinated, I couldn't stop looking. The whole thing clinked when he walked around the house. I really thought there was treasure there, I imagined a chest, something precious, something the key could open, like in Ali Baba. The Palace was just across the road, I really thought the key had something to do with it, that it would open the treasure chest.

I guess the guy was the son of someone who worked for the King. And in the evening, he invited two other friends for a bit of fun, to drink alcohol, have some wine. We watched TV. I remember when it got dark that she was the one who started getting scared, I think she didn't know where we'd sleep, she wanted us to get out of there. I don't know what happened during dinner, I don't remember any more, we

definitely had dinner with them until the friends left. I remember the night. It was completely crazy. Just as I was going to bed, I overheard Saloua say to the guy that she didn't want to leave Rachid alone during the night, she didn't want him sleeping by himself, she'd sleep with him. I could tell he wanted to sleep with her. We watched some more TV, then the three of us got into a double bed, with me there to protect Saloua. There was some touching, of both of us, that's all I remember. There was nothing more than that, even for her. It was very sexual for me, that night. There was nothing but touching. I was six and I was a little repelled by his colour because he was black, I didn't like that. Even when I was ten, thinking back on it, I still found it off-putting.

It's difficult to remember details. I think we went to the cinema the following day, all afternoon. It was a popular place, there was a double-bill, a crowd, a battle at the ticket-counter and before we got to it a great iron gateway where we were already squashed in a crowd. He took charge of buying our tickets from a guy round the back, so we didn't have to queue. It was a cinema in the medina where they showed Bollywood films and karate movies. It was a cinema where you just go, make yourself at home – I went back later when I was sixteen or seventeen – the people there were bricklayers, painters, workers, they don't go to see a film, they go to be *there*, to talk, smoke... At the end of the show the guy picked us up and I don't remember anything after that, until the evening of the next day when we went home.

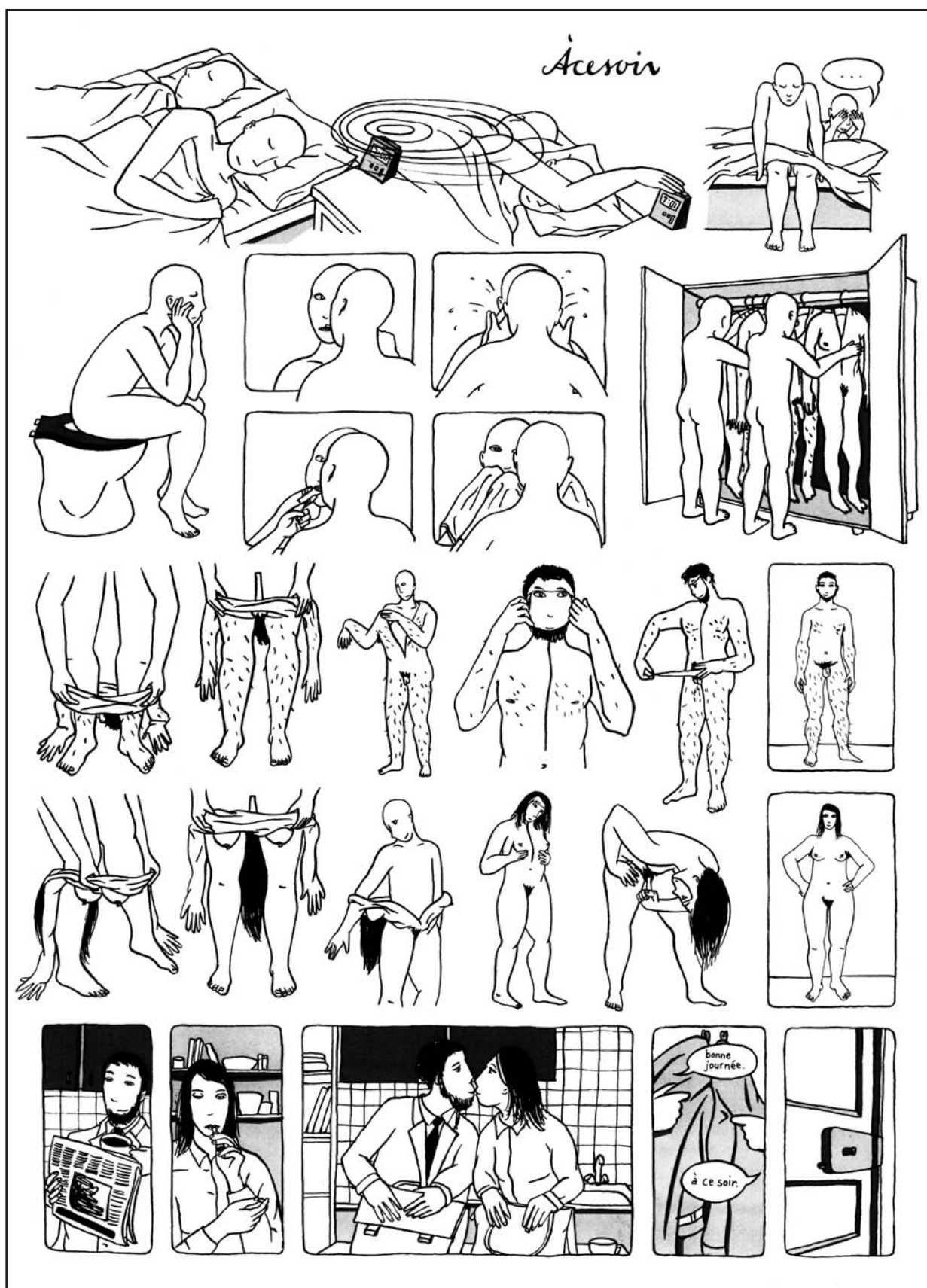
We drove back in a taxi. Suddenly we caught each other's eye, on the street, before going inside, realising what we'd just done: gone away for two whole days. She went into her house and I went into mine, across the road. Only my grandmother was there. She gasped, shocked to see me. "Where have you been?" – "I was with Saloua." I asked: "Where are the others?" She said: "They're all out looking for you." My father had gone to the radio station to make an announcement because he worked nearby. I was only frightened of one thing: that my brother would get back before everyone else. I wanted my father to be there, he'd protect me. When he came back with my mother (I called her "mother," but she was really my mother's sister) he took me and locked me in the bedroom so he could ask me questions, and I told him everything. It was a way of showing the others, showing my brother, that I was punished, that he'd done his job.

My mother was weeping, she told me later that they'd been close to getting divorced, my father had warned her that if they didn't find Rachid he would leave her. She ought to have been more careful, even though she wasn't there when I left. I know that they went to Saloua's house after that to talk to her sister about it, to scream at her, actually. I got up the next

morning and went to see Saloua, but she wasn't there any more. Her sister said she'd gone to her grandmother's, but I had a strong suspicion that she hadn't. I knew her better, I knew she was capable of going further than just to stay with her grandmother. Her sister said that Saloua had taken money when we went to the beach. We stayed another fortnight in that house, then it was the end of the holidays. I was pleased to be starting school, excited.

Later, years later, I saw the guy again in the street, in Rabat. I didn't speak to him. I was still convinced he was a slave who'd been trusted to guard some precious treasure, it was crazy to think like that still, childish. But I never saw Saloua again. It was sad. When I remember the story, when I tell it, I don't feel completely childish. Except for the bit about the key. I was a child when I saw it. ■

Originally published as "Fugue" in *L'enfant ébloui*. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1995.



Linda France A Hundred Years in Heaven

*

The pleasure
of the light switched off,
of whispers and dares
riding on the breath,
a hundred curses
honey on the lips.
Then stealing them,
just there, in the dark.

*

Hair tousled,
clothes awry,
half-bird,
half-goddess,
she takes
the one she loves.

*

I made love
with you like that
to gorge on
your sweetness.
Don't think me wild.
Love is an art
I've not been trained in.

*

It was like touching
the softest petals
moist with dew,
the hundred secret places
she took my hands.
Or was that night just a dream?
Today she tosses
her head,
won't even look at me.

*

They asked if she'd spilled
something on her breast,
some sauce perhaps.
They laughed when she tried
to brush it away,
just a love scratch.

*

The whole night
we made love slowly,
body pressed against body,
cheek against cheek.
We spoke every thought aloud.
Lost in each other's arms,
lost in words, we never noticed
dawn had risen,
night had passed.

The original Sanskrit texts span 200 BC – c11th century, written by various poets, male and female. Their work survives for us in translations by Andrew Schelling (*The Cane Groves of Narmada River*, City Lights Books, 1998).

Mine are versions rather than literal translations. I wanted to bring my own perspective and rhythms to the women's voices. Although I have taken liberties, their playfulness and appetite reflect the spirit of longing in the originals, as well as some of the depictions of women in Indian erotic art. LF

Her Book of the Streets

Michał Witkowski

from *Love City*

Translated from the Polish by W. Martin

A bottle of homemade liqueur lands on the table. It tastes of herbs; it's cloudy, strong, and a little too minty. We drink and smoke. They start to loosen up. They talk about how life just isn't what it used to be. No soldiers, no park; and now the queers entertain themselves in modern, elegant bars that anyone can go to, bars crowded with journalists and wannabe movers-and-shakers. But they're not queers anymore, they're gays. Tanning salons, techno music, froo-froo. And no one there has any sense of filth or criminality – it's all about having fun.

But in the old days... In the old days, they would stand in the street by the public toilets and right away it was obvious that something filthy was going on. During the whole of communism there was a little Orbis-run bar across from the opera that everyone called The Little Fairy, or the Orbis Lounge, or Fairyland, or – as those just passing through would call it – Fairy Bar. All five square metres of it! *In the café on the corner there's a concert every night.* Two fat ladies stood behind the counter serving mostly coffee and cognac. Just walking past on the street you could smell the coffee from inside, the odour of sweet decay emanating, no doubt, from the jelly tarts in the refrigerated glass case, the cheap perfume. Where did that smell come from? How come a blind-folded person using just his nose would straight away detect that out of twenty café bars, this was the one infused with the stink of decay?

Patricia, Lucretia von Schretke, the Countess, Cora, Joanna the Priest's Girl, Giselle, Jessica, Madame d'Aubergine, and Golda, aka La Belle Helene, spent all their free days there. Now and then a lonely traveler would wander in, take a seat on one of the high bar stools, and, immersing himself in that stench, would watch the men walking by outside the window. Out of boredom he would ponder the word ORBIS painted across the glass, which from inside appeared inverted: SIBRO. Sibro, the most beautiful word in the world! More often than not it would be raining, more often than not he would light up a Carmen, and more often than not he would not leave alone. But before he left, all of them – Patricia,

Lucretia, the Countess, Cora, Giselle, and Jessica, who was the first to get AIDS – would all begin winking at him, buying him drinks, and glancing impatiently at the toilet door.

They were all hoping for a stroke, or more, of good fortune, for something that happened maybe once a year, at the most: the door would open and in through the heavy, plush, crimson curtain would come a soldier or fireman or teenage boy who was thinking of trying it for the first time. No one ended up there by accident, even though the place was utterly generic: no neon sign, no suggestive name. Whenever someone new finally did show up, he was usually nervous; his hands would tremble as he stirred the grounds of his Turkish coffee in its plain glass cup; and he would keep getting up from the stool, which was awkward to sit on. Those infamous bar stools, always either too high or too low... For the novices, the bi-curious, having discovered by chance where it was that the pederasts congregated, the bar stools were always the first hurdle.

A boy would sit there fidgeting. He'd drape his jacket over the stool and sit down on it. But then he'd remember he had a pack of cigarettes in the pocket, carefully hidden from his mother! He'd realise he'd have to retrieve them somehow, light one, his hands trembling, and make sure they all knew how grown-up he was. And above all, he'd have to try not to fall off the stool, not to flinch at the sudden roar of the espresso machine behind him, not to jump at his own reflection in the window with the inscription: SIBRO. Brand-name Beverages, Cakes to Order, Coffee, Cognac, and definitely not to collapse from excitement or embarrassment whenever the other men winked at him, fondled their crotches, and glanced at the toilet door. And they'd all be winking; they'd wink at each other and point at the boy.

I was that boy.

I, who back then thought making art meant smoking cigarettes, who confused being an artist with drinking, who mistook writing for being a whore, for autumn, for everything. It was nineteen eighty-eight. The espresso machine howled in a fury,

and I always had a melancholy song running through my head. Outside, autumn was underway, and it smelled of burning leaves. The first frost of winter is hardly a time for a young man with an awakening lust for life. After a few cognacs I began to feel ill and vomited into the urinal a brown mélange of sugary coffee and spirits. Someone walked in after me and squealed with exaggerated horror: "Heavens, chicken here's about to be sick!" I must have been fifteen or so. The man, who had a moustache and a shoulder-bag, was probably thirty. What was I thinking, engrossed in the spluttering sound of the espresso machine, on that wet, grey day when I bunked off school and spent my lunch money on coffee and cognac instead? He told me that if I was up for it, we could go to the toilets at the train station, that by slipping the toilet lady a few zlotys we could both sit in the cubicle for as long as we liked, and that the toilet lady always had a special cubicle with an Out of Order sign that she rented out.

It was horribly cold at the train station. I was shivering, and my legs were like jelly. My fingers smelled of cigarettes and stale dried vomit, nervous sweat and cologne. My legs continued to shake as I stood in the cubicle, although it wasn't so cold anymore. Afterwards, once it was over, I had the taste of genitalia in my mouth – salty, syrupy – along with that awful aftertaste of cigarettes: I wasn't used to smoking. I vomited a few more times that day. My jumper reeked of it, too. Love bites surfaced on my neck, reddening treacherously like the first symptoms of AIDS. I would have to hide them under a polo-neck, under a scarf. My lips were sore, dirty, chapped. The guy took a liking to my watch and asked if he could have it. I was so untethered I gave it to him without a word. Later, of course, I remembered that I wasn't even an adult yet and that my parents were still curious about what I did with my possessions.

That was how I met them. Years later, returning from some literary event or other, I ran into Patricia at the train station, and we arranged to do an interview.

The Little Fairy was managed by Mother Joan of the Homos, aka Pani Jola – the only real woman among that crowd. She must have been sixty. She was heavy-set, vulgar, with piercing eyes that were always winking, always reflecting the mustached or smooth-shaven face of her next interlocutor at the bar, his glass of cognac raised in a toast. She tended the bar but never served anyone. Instead, she drank with her patrons, denouncing them as slags and whores, and they loved her for it. Her eyes, always a little bleary and bloodshot, reflected not just people but entire histories. They were so shiny and glassy you could watch the front door opening and closing in them, and right behind it the heavy crimson curtain hanging from a rod that kept the heat from escaping; you could see,

too, who was doing what to whom and for how much. Mother Joan of the Homos could have – no, she *should* have! – written a book of the Wrocław streets.

Every day she should have written the stories down on the bar tabs with her Orbis pen. Story A: Two cognacs, one coffee, one strawberry torte with jelly; story B: coffee and a pack of Carmens; story C: four vodkas followed by four shots of the same, on the tab. Oh, what has become of those bar tabs from 1988? Where are those stories now, sticky from sweet cakes and grimy with cigarette ash? Where are Mother Joan's enormous bosoms now, the luxury of them, which went unheeded, unneeded, by everyone? Bosoms that no doubt had a little amber heart dangling between them, an inebriated and good heart, filled with understanding for everybody's problems. With the obstinacy of a true maniac, Mother Joan of the Homos insisted they were all problems of the heart. All of them. And that's exactly what she would say: "Jessica's not about, she's in the toilet. Some problem of the heart has banished her there."

But Mother was entitled to talk like that because she'd been endowed with two enormous hearts, not to mention the amber pendant rocking between them. Her puffy face, her emergency loans, her giving of booze on credit, how she'd once bought a stolen set of Finnish knives and all manner of other hot merchandise, and her discreet anti-Semitism when she hugged one of the queens:

"Sweetness, you know I have nothing against Jews, but for God's sake, *shaaaave!*" she would gurgle, nestling the unshaven face between her bosoms. And yet she would sniff out the Jew in all of us. I had only to go to the toilet for Mother Joan of the Homos to exclaim:

"Look at Snow White's profile... Wouldn't you girls say she's got something of the Ahashrachabash about her?"

As a woman of at least three hearts, she had more than enough maternal instinct to spare for the black-market money changers across the street, in the café of the Hotel Monopol. Of all the queens in the world, the money changers tolerated only Golda, aka La Belle Helene. I don't know much about her. She always wore an impeccable suit, and she went through life without ID papers, until they were procured for her at the old people's home. Before that, after she'd lost her money, she lived in the kitchen of her former maid. The money changers once threw a fiftieth birthday party for her at that unfortunate Monopol, where Golda sat on a golden throne wearing a golden jacket. But none of the other queens attended, because they weren't allowed in.

In any case, although the money changers entered the haze of The Little Fairy with visible revulsion, certain interests kept luring them there. Mother would buy gold from them, and she operated as a

kind of one-person pawnshop-cum-*bureau de change*. The money changers would stand at the high bar, embarrassed by their satchels (also known as fag-bags), shifting their weight from foot to foot. Their legs were invariably wrapped in bright nylon tracksuit bottoms, their waists girdled with belt-bags. Russian signet rings, watches, all sorts of tokens – Mother would test each item with her teeth, then deposit it in her bra, or some other cranny of her ample body, to keep it warm.

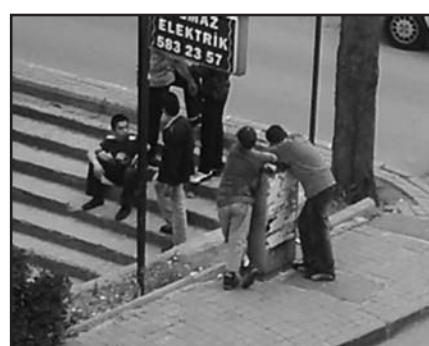
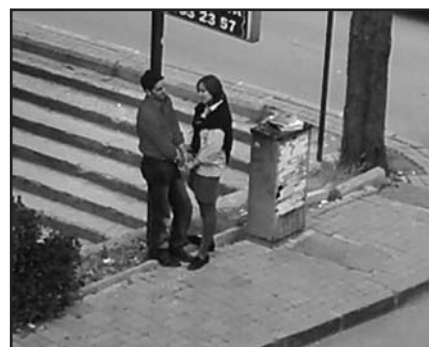
Goodness, how jealous Mother's regulars would get, how they hated the money changers! Was it because she referred to their petty, dirty business, all of which reeked of illicit hard currency, as problems of the heart, as well? Was it because of her generosity? Or was it ultimately because she satisfied the money changers' need for maternal love and kindness, too? No, there was another reason for the queens' hostility: the money changers viewed her with completely different eyes, and she, for her part, played erotic games with them.

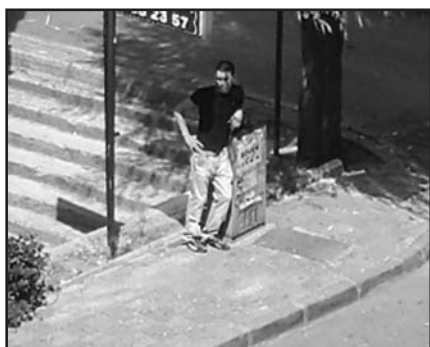
"Pani Jola's grumpy today, Pani Jola can't have gotten much sleep..." Without the money changers, Pani Jola was simply Mother Joan; but in their presence, she was transformed into a Woman. When she talked to the queens, she would smile indulgently and show curiosity. She looked at us as if we were two-

headed calves. And she never tired of hearing the simplest jokes, like: "I'll whack you with my hand-bag," or: "I'll just gather up my petticoat and be off." As soon as any of us told one of those jokes, Mother Joan of the Homos would burst into paroxysms of laughter, and with her chubby fist mop away the tears that smeared her makeup. She couldn't get enough of talking to us as if we were women, but in fact her own repertoire of jokes was far skimpier than the ones that made her laugh.

Pani Jola was one of those people who disappeared completely after the fall of communism. The ground simply swallowed them up sometime in the mid-nineties. Even as late as 1991 she had a go at setting up a little confectionary stall, but it didn't work out. If I ran into Pani Jola today, I'm sure she'd either be in the gutter or else stylishly slim, all done up like a spoilt European. And instead of her book of the streets, all she'd care about would be her cheque book. ■

First published as *Lubiewo*. Krakow: Korporacja Ha!art, 2005. To be published as *Love City* by Portobello Books in 2009.





Boys Club was not intended to be an artwork. It was my voyeuristic archive of photographs taken from my flat's window. I spied on the boys hanging out on the corner of my street. My initial motivation was sexual, but the more I got into it and their individual details were revealed, the boys turned from *objet petit* as into characters. I took photos for almost two years. The exhibition of this work was an opportunity to make a visual-mapping of in situ masculinity and of how men (especially youngsters/bul- lies/"real guys") conquer and convert public space in Turkey. *ES*

Erinc Seymen
Boys Club

Edith Södergran

Love

translated from the Swedish by Kathleen Bryson

My soul was a light-blue gown, sky-coloured;
I left it on a cliff by the sea
and naked I came to you, resembling a woman.
And like a woman I sat at your table
and drank a toast with wine and breathed in the scent of several roses.
You found me beautiful, resembling something you'd seen dreaming,
I forgot everything, I forgot my childhood and my homeland,
I knew only that your caresses held me captive.
And, smiling, you took up a mirror and bade me look.
I saw that my shoulders were made of dust and crumbled away,
I saw that my beauty was sick and had no desire other than to – disappear.
Oh, hold me close in your arms, so tightly that I need nothing.

28

Kärlek

Min själ var en ljusblå dräkt av himlens färg;
jag lämnade den på en klippa vid havet
och naken kom jag till dig och liknade en kvinna.
Och som en kvinna satt jag vid ditt bord
och drack en skål med vin och andades in doften av några rosor.
Du fann att jag var vacker och liknade något du sett i drömmen,
jag glömde allt, jag glömde min barndom och mitt hemland,
jag visste endast att dina smekningar höllo mig fången.
Och du tog leende en spegel och bad mig se mig själv.
Jag såg att mina skuldror voro gjorda av stoft och smulade sig sönder,
jag såg att min skönhet var sjuk och hade ingen vilja än – försvinna.
O, håll mig sluten i dina armar så fast att jag ingenting behöver.

Secret Dynasty

Frans Kellendonk

from *The Body Mystic*
translated from the Dutch by Andrew May

Everyone has his own way of tying his shoelaces, but Broer saw someone at the petrol pump in the village who tied them exactly the same way as his riper beau. This other boy dropped swiftly to one knee without bending his back and tied the same double knot in as roundabout a way. In Broer's memory, the door he'd so often knocked at in vain swung open as if by magic. When the other boy sprang back to his feet next to his moped, Broer found himself face to face with the love he thought he'd lost. I'm back again!

Love was back again, at least something that closely resembled it, with the same greed, the same insistence. Broer knew where he could bump into this other boy: a bridge had been built next to the pool where he went swimming in the afternoon. The bridge would eventually link up with a motorway, for which a sand embankment had already been raised, but in the meantime it served as an open-air disco. Torches were set up in the evening. Screams ricocheted across the water. From a distance you could hear the whoosh of roller-skate wheels on the asphalt, at least in the brief moments when the ghetto-blasters the youngsters brought along weren't tearing the music to shreds. Later in the evening, after they'd knocked back a drink or two, stalks of piss grew from the river to the bridge's railings.

Broer mingled with the village youth. In the dark he could still get away with it. He doled out cans of beer and cigarettes, talked about the New World where the clocks lagged a workday behind and western civilisation with its gadgetry and television series was already light years ahead. The attentive other boy swept a mop of thick blond hair from his eyes, eyes that as yet remained colourless, in an automatic flicking motion (let my hand be your comb hand!), his mouth open just a fraction. He was roller-skating, and on the bridge Broer saw that swift drop to the knee again, as if he were sinking upright through the asphalt, the fumbling with laces. The boy should never get his hair cut, no one should be allowed to show him an easier way to tie laces, and he should definitely steer clear of the village girls who stood

snickering near the ramp in their too-tight tops. But a languid semi-somnolence protected the boy. It was only when he looked Broer in the eyes that he briefly came radiantly awake – and yes, it would be great to go to the pool with him tomorrow, sure.

The pool lay in a bend in the river dyke. During Broer's absence, the sorry strip of woodland between the road and the water, which was sixteen metres wide and reputed to be littered with British bombs, had been declared a nature reserve. It was fenced off with barbed wire and had been given some fancy, archaically spelt name. Dumping trash and rubble was forbidden now, and cyclists and mopeds were barred.

In the afternoon, Broer had the place to himself. Towards evening, he'd been caught unawares a few times by a state of euphoria, as he lay cooling off in the black water and the sky turned a deeper blue, along the banks the blue of dragonfly bodies shimmered, two blue bundles invisibly conjoined, and the blue of magpie flanks flashed between the crooked birch trees and the willows bowed over the pool. His cares had become as invisible as the grey in his hair and a moment later a toxic sorrow had spread to the extremities of his body, which grew heavy and sank listlessly to the bottom of the pool.

How he'd managed to overcome the enemy inside him was a mystery, but each time he'd hauled himself to the bank, the same bank where he now lay scanning the body of the moped-riding other boy, along the length of his blond stomach that breathed up and down with little jolts. Would he wrap his arm around this boy and draw him towards him by way of a test? It was a test that urgently needed taking, like the pink champagne test of the deceased riper beau back then. By uniting with this boy, he would prove to himself that he didn't really believe in his illness. The boy could heal him.

The distance between their bodies was no more than five centimetres. The fact that there was no one to be seen for miles around seemed in every sense an invitation to dive in, except there was almost no space to lie down on the banks of the pool. Between

the birch trees and the willows, most of the shore was overrun by brambles. The patches of grass you could lie on were no more than a metre wide, which rendered those five centimetres as meaningless, Broer thought guardedly, as the heartfelt proximity of two passengers in a crowded tram.

But he detected a warmth that came from more than the sun. It had something human about it and, quite unlike the warmth in an overcrowded tram, something cordial. When he surreptitiously leered at the other boy he saw that sensation confirmed in the warm welcome of the green eyes (they were green, to top the parallelism) and, when he quickly looked away again, in the hand that must have lain on his perspiring, innocent thigh for some time already.

"People gossip about you," said the boy in an involuntary whisper. "Strange things are said about you ..."

Broer had noticed that, too. On the road to Doornenhof there was a meadow he couldn't pass without a sheep starting to bleat. In no time a whole meadow of sheep would be baaing at him scornfully and he'd have to push on, crimson-faced. Cows threw their rumps in the air when he passed, and, beside themselves with curiosity, trotted to the barbed wire to gawp at him with no hint of embarrassment. "So, what kind of things are they saying?" he mumbled through his teeth, which hadn't awaited the resolution of the cerebral quandary but had immediately proceeded to nibble on the blond earlobe, around the slightly darker hairline and neck of the boy's body that spread itself more welcomingly with every shudder.

"Nothing that's not true, I'm glad to say," the boy sighed, and Broer tried to imagine how empty a humane, sex-forsaking gesture would be now, how crappy they'd feel if they were to part without bringing this to its conclusion. Could he really find it in his heart to become one flesh with this dream of a blond boy, as he was now in the act of becoming, if he were truly bearing death in his body? Surely he wasn't a beast.

And should it turn out he had made the boy pregnant with death – as he pondered when they parted company at the wooden turnstile where the moped stood, when the crappy feeling hit all the same, and it turned out he wasn't cured of his illness – then at least that unintended consequence would have the elegance of symmetry. For then, as against the dynasty of life that his sister Prul had established, he would have instituted a secret dynasty of death ("Go forth and multiply," he called out silently to any nano-bugs the boy might be carrying), an anti-creation to her creation. It was obvious there was no way he could subject himself to her female reign of terror, so that was the only dignified solution. Yes, he thought, as he cycled past fields where

irrigation systems swished out posies of spray, in the crest of each spray-posy a one-man rainbow that turned with his gaze, if I can't be an angel then I'll just have to be a devil. ■

First published as *Mystiek Lichaam*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1986.

Frances Bingham

Translating Sappho

The fragments lend themselves to interpretation;
it is the gaps that are difficult.

*Love makes my heart shiver again:
wind rippling the oak-trees on the mountain.*

Some translations use brackets, or ellipsis
to indicate that something is missing...
I prefer those that also leave a space.
There the imagination works.

*Aphrodite, my great patron,
I call on you.
Show me your favour now,
grant me her kisses.
The Goddess answers: Yes,
all that you desire, my dear,
shall be yours.
She craves your love already.*

But then - a free translation of lacunae?
(Such fretwork poems might go anywhere.)

O honey-tasting sweetheart...

Think back...

Here on this gentle bed...

I am burning...

It has been done before.
The different approach - profane or sacred -
is never new. See b. and a. below.

*The moon has set,
the Pleiades sink too;
alone, alone I sleep
while night moves past me.*

*The moon goes down,
stars various go down -
waiting in bed,
I long to do the same.*

Neither is accurate, both give the flavour
of the original - to different readers.

*I have been blessed twice over by the muses
who gave me this voice which will sound forever.*

Through the millennia of word-for-wording,
no one has successfully disguised
the gender of her muses yet -

*Beautiful women,
how I have loved you
as I will always...*

- nor transposed other phrases, other blanks,
alien to the distinctive Lesbian mode
(notoriously so difficult to render).

*Come, my friends,
let us sing for Aphrodite.*

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33

The Bells

Menis Koumantareas

Translated from the Greek by Nina Rapi

34

The Bells looked like a cave: low lighting, and an array of terrifying skewers, razor-sharp axes, shepherd's crooks and hand-woven shoulder bags on the walls, along with copper curios and plaster casts of kids and baby lambs. The effect was something like a museum of rural Greece. While you ate, you'd hear the typical ding of the food-order bell, competing with the local church bells. The sound was menacing. It felt more like a call to a secret ritual than an invitation to a feast.

This taverna must have been around for a while; it was already there when I moved to Kipseli from Victoria in the Eighties, like an immigrant myself. It made the best *kontosouvli*, *splinantero*, doner kebab, pork steaks and lamb chops – exactly what the doctor ordered against.

The bell system was on the outside of the serving counter and was operated by an electric lever next to the cash-register. The owner's son, an unassuming and silent boy, was guardian and bell-ringer. At the right time, and with a single gesture, he'd get the bells singing.

Mimaros was the owner. We never knew whether this was his first or last name, or a nickname. He was around sixty, of average height, always smartly dressed in suit and tie, all pressed and square, with small, mistrusting eyes deep in their sockets. He'd sit at a table facing the cash-register, supervising the orders that had to be clocked before reaching the customers' tables. He'd also clock the women who passed by on the pavement.

As quiet and sweet-tempered as the son was, the father was grim and brutal. When he wasn't counting the orders, he'd be drinking his whisky, set permanently on a plinth next to him. Often when drunk, he'd spout fucking-Christ-fucking-Jesus-fucking-Virgin-Mary and other such Christian Orthodox sermons. We didn't pay much attention. We knew it was a combination of alcohol and a certain fascistic idiosyncrasy.

At one point, The Bells was where we hung out. There were four of us. Two middle-aged men and two young ones. Thanasis, poet and essayist, tall, long-faced, constantly on the move, sensitive; he knew all

sorts of people in the arts about whom he'd have many a story to tell, always with panache. But he was no snob. He'd gladly keep company – like me – with total unknowns, like the two young men around us at the time. They were foreign – Albanian immigrants.

Nikos, or Nicolin in Albanian, was tall and well-built, with green eyes and thick wavy light-brown hair tied back with a ribbon low down at the back of his neck. He was obsessed with football, played in an amateur team and worked as a painter and decorator. He had the soul of a footballer and the body of a construction worker.

Fotis, dark and beefy with a moon face and sharp eyes, was studying to be a nurse at a technical college, but worked on building sites from time to time. He wrote lyrics for songs and dreamt of becoming an actor. He had, in fact, worked as an extra on a couple of colour film productions.

I don't know how the staff and the customers saw us. Whether the difference in age and nationality seemed unusual or slightly suspect. But Thanasis and I didn't care. The two youngsters would listen to us attentively. Fotis because he could benefit in his pursuit of an acting career; and Nicolin – out of a natural respect for his friend, even though he wasn't interested in what we were saying. I was moved by their friendship and the pure faith they had in each other to the point that it made me question whether my friendship with Thanasis had the same solid base, even though we went back a long way.

Regardless, the young men's company helped me escape the claustrophobia of writing. I'd breathe pure oxygen from the Albanian countryside – the way ours used to be in the villages and small towns a few decades ago – and listen sympathetically to their difficulties of adapting to life in Greece and stories of the bureaucratic hell they had to go through. Thanasis had great artistic plans for Fotis, but I was of the opinion they should stay in their jobs and make good. Fotis as a nurse and Nicolin as a builder.

That night, we were eating in our cave with its shepherd's crooks and cloaks, all dusty and deserted in the

city smog like immigrants themselves. We'd ordered our barbequed steaks or burgers and were drinking our wine. At the table next to ours was a group of men in their thirties, all Albanians, as we soon found out. They also seemed hard-working, but wilder and more down-to-earth than our young friends, unaware of things like art and possibly of friendship, too.

Mimaros, the owner, had taken his usual seat opposite the cash-register, clocking the orders, drinking one whisky after another. With each shot, his tongue got looser. He grumbled about the politicians doing a foul job. His words reached our ears like a drone but were clear enough, marked by nationalism and the junta. We didn't pay much attention. We continued eating and talking, the youngsters teaching the elders and the elders – the youngsters.

Mimaros' voice started rising above the usual taverna sounds. He was done with the politicians and had turned to the foreigners. They were the poison taking our jobs, pushing our kids out of school and contaminating Greek society. As if we'd never been immigrants in America and Germany and what have you. His son, sitting by the cash-register, silent and expressionless, gave no indication as to whether he agreed with his father or had his own opinions. The chef standing over the coals, and the two waiters going back and forth like flies, listened with the same impassivity. Perhaps this was common to them.

The rantings of the drunken owner turned from drone to boom. The word "Albanian" hung in the air along with various decorative adjectives. I felt numb listening to it all, and threw questioning glances at the two youngsters. Fotis listened to the insults stoically but Nicolín had started to shift anxiously in his chair. Who knows what they felt about the venomous outpouring. Thanasis and I tried to ignore it and carried on talking.

All of a sudden, one of the three Albanians shot up, the darkest and the wildest, like a flame from a slow-burning fire threatening to scorch everything around it, like a blade thrust out of a barber's razor, and he stood over Mimaros, full of menace.

"What did you say, you wrinkled old fuck?" he said in perfect Greek. "What did you say, you shit-eating creep? Say it again!"

He grabbed Mimaros by the collar and lifted him off his seat. Mimaros continued to swear, sunk in a sweet drunken haze.

Carnage, I thought.

Strange. No-one else seemed to be aware of what was going on. The son continued to count the orders, the waiters stood to one side and the doner-skewer kept turning round and round.

In the hands of the Albanian, Mimaros, the all-powerful despot, the foul-mouthed boss, had turned from perpetrator to victim in seconds. I could see drunken terror in his small, devious eyes, as if he

were living his moment of death. I also saw the pleasure in his expression. As if he'd quested for this death. Who knows, I thought, perhaps he's full of self-disgust. Perhaps this stranger, this dark foreigner is his nemesis, an Angelic Terminator.

"Tell me, you fucking asshole," the Angel continued. "Say it again! Are you too scared now?"

He was shoving him and thrashing him about. Mimaros' ironed blue shirt was like scrunched up paper in the Albanian's hands.

Bells rang. They were not the bells of the food orders. They sounded like bells from the depths of hell.

The son was motionless, as if shackled to his father's shadow. The waiters turned to stone. For a moment, even the doner-skewer stopped rotating. Only the smell of charred meat stood in the air, like human flesh burning.

At that moment, and while we all waited to see and smell blood, as if our thirst for it had not be satisfied by watching so much television, Nicolín jumped out of his seat like a skilled goal-keeper to catch the ball.

He grabbed the would-be killer, made a human shield of himself and with great effort pulled him off his victim. He must have said something to him in Albanian, because the dark Albanian backed off. But seconds later he pounced on Mimaros again, grabbed him by the collar, sneakily, as if to confirm the reputation of his race. As if, at the same time, he wanted to avenge the blood of all those beaten up in holding prisons and killed in border guardhouses. Nicolín grabbed him again and managed to curb his rage, holding him tightly in a hug. Some primal light was emanating from him as if he were trying to illuminate the other man's darkness. He managed to take him outside onto the pavement and there – always holding him tightly in that hug, as if the two were dancing a waltz – kept talking to him.

Mimaros fell back like an empty sack onto his seat, accidentally knocking over his glass of whisky, which smashed to the floor.

Within seconds, the Albanian came back, took his mates with him – no one dared ask him to pay the bill – and left. Everything happened with cinema-like speed. A tableau followed – no one moved. As if everything and everyone had been told by some invisible director to freeze. After a short while, one of the waiters made the first move and approached Mimaros' table. He bent over and picked up the pieces of glass, all the while ignoring the drinker.

Nicolín came back to our table, his hair wild – his ribbon lost in the fight. Wet and sweaty. His white shirt had come out of his trousers and flapped like a ceasefire flag. He sat down as if nothing had happened and carried on eating and drinking.

Mimaros, slumped in his chair, looked like he'd just recovered from a fainting spell. Perhaps he even

thought he was in a dream. A nightmare. He was breathing with difficulty. It was only then that his son left his post behind the cash-register and went to his father. He and the waiters gave him water, wiped his forehead and loosened his tie. They persuaded him to leave the taverna and find refuge in his usual corner in the bar next door. Who knows, the Albanian might come back, and if he did, there'd be no one there to rescue him.

Staggering, as if he'd suddenly developed a limp, Mimaros disappeared out of sight.

"He'd have torn him to pieces," Fotis said.

"Thank God he didn't," Thanasis added, clearly relieved.

I was looking at Nicolin. He wasn't talking. Here is a fine young man, I thought. He is Vasilis Arvanitis, the hero I'd read about in a book by Mirivilis when I was a teenager during the German Occupation. That hero came alive as Nicolin, the Albanian. I now saw him through different eyes.

We stayed for a while longer, nibbling. No-one in the taverna had the humility to thank Nicolin. The atmosphere became heavy and we prepared to leave. It was only after a comment I made as we reached the door that they said a half-hearted "Thank you."

It's been some time now since our group of four broke up. As if that episode in *The Bells* had been the climax of our friendship. As if nothing after that could offer the same intensity. But it was also as if the place itself had decayed, and the only solution was to draw the shutters.

From what I hear, Nicolin gave up the football fields and became a plasterer. Fotis and Nicolin continue to meet regularly. Such friendships are never ruined. At least not during youth, when each sees the other as a demigod.

Fotis gave up his dream of becoming an actor. He works as a nurse but has kept up with his writing. The lessons Thanasis gave him were obviously productive. When I ran into Fotis once, he said: "It would be great if the four of us could meet up again!"

But the cycle had closed.

Meanwhile, I lost touch with Thanasis. It seems this is how friendships go. They disappear, reappear, or get lost for ever. As permanent as human affairs can be: in constant flux.

The Bells shut down, changed its face and its name, the way old houses fall and are replaced by blocks of flats with the contractor's name in bold letters. Gone are the food order bells. Only the church bells still ring. The plaster casts of lambs, the shepherd's crooks and cloaks and the shepherds themselves have been replaced by air-conditioning, satellite television, neon lights and the shop windows that have taken over the square. Gone is the darkness and claustrophobia. But gone, too, is the intensity of subterfuge.

As for Mimaros, I see him in the nearby bar which he frequents religiously, always sitting in the same spot. He's now on crutches. I asked why. They told me they had to amputate his leg because of alcohol abuse or diabetes or something like that. That disturbed me somehow.

Since then, every time I pass him, I avoid looking to see which of his legs is missing. His amputated leg reminds me of a lost friendship. As for him, he still stares out at the pavement and the women who cross it, with not a second glance at his old shop. As if he's written it off. I like to imagine that with it he has also written off his armoury of curses. A half-man now, and perhaps because of that, a human being at last. ■

First published as *Xxxxxxx xxxxxxxxx. Xxxxx
xxxxxxx xxxxxxxxx*



37

Love

Zizi Fareesheh

38

Just before I told Radwan I was in love with him, he turned gay. I felt his penis once. He later dated a number of women; three, to be exact. He had sex with them, all the way, and claims he enjoyed it. He and I only have a few kisses to laugh about today. We still touch and play and it's quite sexual, but we don't fret about it now and he lives on the gayest street in Toronto.

Radwan and I have been best friends for twelve years. We met in the winter of 1994. I was quite lonely then, I called an old acquaintance, Kareem, and asked him to help me, I needed friends. He invited me over a couple of nights later. In his bedroom on his bed and a couple of chairs I met Radwan and Laith. I fucked Laith later, but at the time, he had his hands on Reem, my classmate. Another classmate of mine who was there, Suha with the green eyes, had the hots for Radwan. She was the girl he chose to go out with just before he turned gay and then broke up with her. She was the girl with green eyes who got all the boys. Even Hazem, who I liked in high school a few years back. Suha's all married and has kids now. She got Hamad, a nice boring husband. Reem is married with two kids. She and her husband Fadi got married because she got pregnant. They live in Australia.

Both Reem and Suha were my best friends at a certain time. I don't like either of them today. All those days spent together during school. All the nights they slept over at my house. I store them way back in my memory. They bore me now. They and everything about them, the marriage, the kids, the hairstyles, the clothes, the make-up, the nails, the houses. The boring boring regularity of it all disgusts me. A couple of years later, Laith went to England to study and hardly ever came back, I remember Reem hid in our bathroom and cried. I don't think he gave a damn. He was such a cold existentialist fuck.

Kareem left later to the US, he had a weird girlfriend, Rand. We knew he used to fuck her up the ass because she wanted to remain a virgin. Once his mother caught them and the wretched girlfriend had to escape running from the house. She still

sneaked back in. She must have enjoyed it.

Well, what was I trying to say? Yes, Radwan and I were once in our favourite café downtown, Balat al-Rasheed Café, just after *iftar* on a Ramadan evening. We'd just been walking through the deserted streets, empty of all the people around their dining tables, watching Ramadan soap operas. We chose a small table on the edge of the balcony. It was a cold evening, I remember. I never wore warm enough clothes. We ordered tea with mint, the two of us, and *argeelehs*. I've not had an *argeeleh* in a long time, not since we stopped going to Balat al-Rasheed. I used to like licorice-flavoured *argeeleh*, nice with mint, must have been good for my lungs.

Radwan and I used to meet everyday; we used to hang out, go places. We had a joint social life. We went to books@café a lot and the Zuwadeh Restaurant in Fuheis. We had a large group of friends, mostly gay men, mostly loud, mostly dramatic. I was such a fag hag back then, quite safe and happy. We were used to each other and although we were both big on talking, we were rather silent that evening. It was a nice silence, comfortable. We watched the streets come back to life and the café fill up. There was one table left on the balcony, the smallest and least comfortable, it was the one beside us.

I'd just left university. My boyfriend had just left for England and my other boyfriend was upset with me and I'd soon be off to Palestine to work. Radwan was freelancing, his mother didn't believe he had a job at all. It was a time of turmoil; the whole of my twenties were quite unsteady. It's somewhat different now; we are more regular and relaxed. Someone promised me that things would make sense by the time I hit thirty.

Back at the café: There we were, enjoying our hot tea, blowing up thick clouds of smoke, when a couple walks in, not one of the café regulars. A man and a woman, middle-aged, middle class, leaning more towards lower middle class. The café usually entertained young single men who came alone or in a group to smoke and watch television or play

backgammon or cards. There were also the artists and poets, a few foreigners and those like us: the cool crowd that came down from west Amman.

This couple was unusual. He walked in first, checked out the space, saw the empty table and then allowed her in. She sat down on the farthest chair on the balcony, right next to mine. He sat down in front of her, he didn't have a choice, it was the last remaining spot. They looked happy. They were happy. She'd just washed her hair, curly hair that covered her neck, brown. She wore a simple touch of pink lipstick and black clothes, a black skirt that covered just below her knee, a black woolen jersey and a white shirt. She had the Christian woman look. Basic and simple black clothes, almost asexual, but she was sexy. She was trying to be sexy, trying to be pretty.

He was a big man, with reddish-brown hair, almost straight and thick. He had a moustache, a regular moustache. He was wearing a big jacket. Everything about him was big, he occupied a big space and his voice was big. He took out a red Viceroy packet of cigarettes and she – a blue one, and they both put them on the table. The two of them were at ease with each other. They were interested in each other's company. They were very familiar with each other.

The waiter came for their orders, he ordered first, he asked for tea with mint, then he looked at her expectantly, she asked for coffee, medium sweet. They asked for an *argeeleh*. He looked at her again and asked her for the bag of tobacco. He told the waiter that they had brought their own tobacco for the *argeeleh*, and asked if he was willing to use it. The waiter refused. It was alright with them, nothing bothered them. They settled for regular shop *argeelehs*.

Their hot drinks came and their smokes. They were talking, I had stopped eavesdropping and observing them, they hadn't even noticed me. Radwan and I were talking maybe or watching the street again. Then something in the air about them caught my attention, or maybe it was his tone when he asked her: "Did your husband give you permission to go out tonight?" They laughed. They laughed pleasantly, happily, greedily. I remember my reaction, something close to shock, but not quite. I was touched, impressed, almost humiliated by the power of their alliance, pushed away by their conspiracy. I remember my face, I wanted to tell Radwan, but I didn't want them to hear me. I stood up to leave, the balcony was all theirs, I couldn't watch anymore, I didn't want to know more than the sound of their laughter. I didn't want anything to diffuse that sharp happiness.

I have never forgotten them. I could feel their love that night, their secret affair, they had known

each other for years, they had been in love for years. I can't tell how frequently they got the chance to go out together, but she still wore her lipstick like a sweet teenager and he still took care of her gracefully. ■

Brane Mozetic

36

translated from the Slovenian by Elizabeta Zargi and Timothy Liu

I watch all these thin boys, posing in the corners,
Chinese, Arabs, Blacks, Latinos, Bosnians, how
they laugh, spit while grabbing their dicks.
I undress them with my eyes, over their chests,
their flat stomachs, their dark muscles, about their
bodies to and fro. How they hurl themselves at the ball,
take their shirts off in the heat until beads of sweat
glitter, whistle at girls, and I imagine how they'd
go after me if they knew I was watching them.
Their eyes curiously leap into the world,
and it is clear that the worst is behind me, I can
observe them with ease, for what on earth
would they do in my bedroom, where things are
in order, no need to look out for the police, no need
to get excited about fights, or run from gunshots.
What would they tell their friends, what would
they brag about, what would lend them glamour, the heroes
of the next block. I find smoothness at the gym
where muscles are on display. Or at the
bars, or on the beaches, where thousands of gay men
race against time. Yet how would they
train in my bedroom, how would they compete, when
time stopped, how would they comprehend tiny
kisses, enjoy silence or a whisper.
The unknown would frighten them, as it did you, who,
smiling, proudly stepped through the door, then
became smaller and smaller until you
vanished in the morning haze.

36

Gledam vse te vitke fante, kako postavajo po vogalih,
Kitajci, Arabci, črnci, latinosi, Bosanci, kako se
režijo, pljuvajo naokoli in se prijemljejo za kurce.
Slačim jih s pogledom, prek njihovih prsi,
do ravnega trebuha, temnih mišic, po telesih
sem ter tja. Ali se zaganjajo za žogo po igriščih,
ob vročini si slačijo majice, da bleščijo kapljice
znoja, žvižgajo za dekleti in predstavljam si,
kako bi se spravili name, ko bi vedeli, da jih
opazujem. Oči jim zvedavo skačejo v svet,
meni pa je jasno, da je vse hudo že za mano, da

jih lahko takole mirno motrim, ker le kaj, le
kaj bi delali v moji spalnici, kjer so stvari
urejene, ni treba paziti na policaje, ni se treba
navduševati nad pretepi, ne bežati pred streli.
Le kaj bi imeli povedati prijateljem, s čim bi
se lahko hvalili, kaj bi jim dajalo blišč, junakom
iz sosednje ulice. Zglajenost najdem v dvorani
za fitnes, kjer se razkazujejo mišice. Ali po
barih, ali na plažah, kjer skuša na tisoče
gejev dobiti dirko s časom. Le kako bi trenirali
v moji spalnici, kako bi tekmovali, ko se je
čas ustavil, kako bi lahko doumevali drobne
poljube, uživali v tišini ali zgolj šepetali.
Vse to neznano bi jih plašilo, kakor tebe, ki si ves
ponosen, smejoč se stopil skozi vrata, potem
pa si postajal manjši in manjši, dokler te ni
zjutraj vzela megla.

41

Jesus Encinar

translated from the Spanish by Lawrence Schimel

i recall a day in cordoba
at the exit of the mosque
a gypsy read my palm
and saw a journey in my life
a woman and two children
i knew she lied
because in the cards of my life
only men appear.
even so, i paid
and continued down the street

i would like to tell you this story
right now
to see you laugh
but you're sleeping.
can I wake you?

Arnold de Vos Together

Translated from the Italian by Adeodato Piazza Nicolai

*"If you are ashamed, you can walk at a distance."
(Giuseppe Pontiggia, *Born Twice*)*

And so we went uncoupled
for a long while, avoiding marriage beds
not showering together
leaving the room at alternate moments
using different entrances, the strategy of
differentiated reentries. Together and never together.
Divided by the invisible curtain of convenience:
"If you are ashamed of me, you can walk at a distance."
And you did it. A crooked love was born
that I pay off in solitude. It's not natural for me to live by twos.
My love is a basket weave
with broken wickerwork everywhere: the wear and tear
does its best but usage has broken the bottom.

Insieme

*"Se ti vergogni, puoi camminare a distanza."
(Giuseppe Pontiggia, *Nati due volte*)*

E così siamo andati spaiati
per un bel po', evitando letti matrimoniali
non facendo la doccia insieme
uscendo dalla stanza a momenti alterni
usando ingressi diversi, lo stratagemma dei
rientri differenziati. Insieme, e mai insieme.
Separati dalla cortina invisibile della convenienza:
"Se ti vergogni di me, puoi camminare a distanza."
E lo hai fatto. Ne è nato un amore distorto
che sconto in solitudine. Non mi è naturale vivere a due.
Il mio amore è un intreccio a canestro
coi vimini rotti in ogni punto: l'usura
fa uno sforzo ma la consuetudine ha spaccato il fondo.



43

44



Rock diving remains a leisure sport from one generation to another, twinned to the timeliness of the city's circumstances, reflecting socio-economic conditions such as class divisions and political indifference to the lower rungs of the economic ladder.

Charged with raw adrenaline, these men embody a lurking paradox – the weatherworn timelessness of Beirut and the postwar policy of reconstruction. *RM*

Randa Mirza
La Grotte aux Pigeons

A Call to Madness

Monique Wittig

Translated from the French by Olivia Heal

Raving has become reason, madness the norm. With sheer inconsideration for those poor creatures often put away for life because of it, the proclamation is heard on all public squares: Long live hysteria. And the people could not be happier; obliged to immediately fall into convulsions, delirious outbursts, to tremble, lash out on all sides, howl, roar, tear out one's hair, grind one's teeth, clench one's fists, drool, foam at the mouth, gaze around with wild eyes, jerk one's arms, stamp one's feet, choke, roll around on the ground and... (I won't go on). Any unfortunate passer-by is set upon, summoned to loosen their chains, get over themselves, abandon their aloofness. It's their bad luck if they refuse. The people are quick to drag them to one side, where they have their ways of titillating the nerves. Although they use no physical violence, the passer-by is soon leaping from between their hands, raging onwards, yelling with fury. So they get what they wanted: such feverish frenzy proves there is no escape from the empire of madness.

45

Originally published as "*Les appels à la folie*" in *Paris-la-politique et autres histoires*. Paris: POL, 1999.

46



The Roly-Polys

Monique Wittig

Translated from the French by Olivia Heal

The inhabitants of this town have the propensity to think themselves the centre of the world and that everyone has their eyes trained upon them. They are of the sort that encourages each and every person to quickly curl up in a ball in the name of the body's ideal state, of which all its contours show a tendency towards rolling up: the roundness of the shoulders, the rotundity of the buttocks, the head, the curve of the back. Obligatory rolling-up is thus the order of the day – what they call roly-polying – and which is done with the most ease in the world by staring at one's belly button. It is indeed true that in this position, when the face is level with the belly button and remains stuck there, the legs tend to rise up over the head and fold themselves back again. One couldn't really call it comfortable, but since we're talking about an ideal state, no one complains. Those who walk on their feet cross themselves and salute one another as if they were the sole survivors of a disaster. The followers of rotundity propagate. They head towards the carnival in a prodigious tumult, producing a chant of victory, with an assuredly slow rhythm, which is heard in bursts as the heads disengage in the descending movement of the Roly-Polys. Ah, what a marvelous sight, all those small and large bottoms that show themselves in the air while the tumbling motion hides the face between the legs. Pubic tendrils develop, some reach all the way to the ground. Hair falls loose. Mouths shrivel up. They begin to eat directly through the anus. Never before in any carnival have such delightful figures been seen.

47

Originally published as “*Les mises en boule*” in *Paris-la-politique et autres histoires*. Paris: POL, 1999.

Writers Recommend Translations

Poems that Work in English

Reginald Shepherd

As a general rule, I don't read poetry in translation. I tend to agree with Robert Frost that poetry is what is lost in translation. But there are a few translations of poetry that have meant a lot to me over the years. Clarence Brown and W.S. Merwin's *Osip Mandelstam, Selected Poems*, takes acknowledged liberties but conveys a sense of the power and strangeness of Mandelstam's poetry. James Greene's Penguin *Selected Poems* takes even more liberties (omitting lines and stanzas, amalgamating two poems into a single poem), with the aim of producing poems that work in English.

Paul Celan is one of my favorite poets, but most translations are a bit flat-footed and even awkward-sounding, which I'm sure Celan never was. My favorites (and I have read all of the book-length English translations) are Joachim Neugroschel's *Speech-Grille and Selected Poems*, Katherine Washburn and Margret Gullemmin's *Last Poems*, with selections from his last three books, Nikolai Popov and Heather McHugh's *Glottal Stop: 101 Poems by Paul Celan*, and John Felstiner's *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*. Felstiner has also written a superb biography of Celan.

Andre du Bouchet, who died in 2001, was a leading post-war French poet, but is almost unknown in English, though he was a major translator of English-language literature. There are only two book-length translations of his work into English, and both are superb: Paul Auster's *The Uninhabited: Selected Poems of Andre du Bouchet* (reprinted in Auster's collected *Translations*) and David Mus's *Where Heat Looms* (a translation of du Bouchet's 1961 book *Dans la chaleur vacante*).

Reginald Shepherd is the author of five books of poetry. *Fata Morgana* is his most recent collection. His collection of literary essays, *Orpheus in the Bronx: Essays on Identity, Politics, and the Freedom of Poetry*, is forthcoming.

Snake Charmers

Robert Glück

Makbara by Juan Goytisolo. Goytisolo is an internationally acclaimed writer, and expatriate from Franco's Spain who lives in Morocco. Makbara means graveyard where transactions take place and where people go to make assassinations of all kinds. In this

novel identity is fluid and point of view sometimes changes mid-sentence. It can be funny, or scary.

Eden Eden Eden by Pierre Guyotat. This novel pushes the boundaries of what is possible – it is one long sentence fragment describing total mayhem, nominally in the Algerian war, in which sex and violence are really the same thing. Kathy Acker translated some of it to begin her *Great Expectations*, where it seemed to be describing the war in Viet Nam.

Death and Sensuality by Geroges Bataille. *The Story of the Eye* by Geroges Bataille. Did you ever wonder what sex and death have in common? These books about excess tell you that and a lot more. The first outlines Bataille's system, a counter system to the systems of conservation like Capitalism and Communism. The second is philosophical pornography.

The Thief's Journal by Jean Genet. Well everyone should read at least one Genet novel – he was certainly the greatest snake-charmer of them all.

Robert Glück is the author of numerous books of poetry and fiction including *Denny Smith*, *Jack the Modernist*, *Margery Kempe*, and *Elements of a Coffee Service*.

Mysteries of Translation

Mark Doty

These are five marvelous books of poetry, each a book that somehow manages to distill a sensibility, a way of seeing the world, and to capture a singular voice and point of view. How this is possible in translation exactly is mysterious, but these books are proof that it happens; read them and you know you've met a very particular person, one you will not forget.

C P Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, trans by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherard

Nazim Hikmet, *Things I Didn't Know I Loved*, trans by Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, translated by Don Paterson

Basho, *Back Roads to Far Places*, trans by Sam Hamill

Jean Follain, *A World Rich in Anniversaries*, trans by William Matthews and Mary Feeney

Mark Doty is the author of seven books of poems, two memoirs, and the essay *Still Life With Oysters and Lemon*. His new collection, *Fire to Fire*, will be out in March 2008.

Chroma: Biographies

Nikolay Atanasov was born in Pleven, Bulgaria in 1978. He studied Bulgarian Philology at Sofia University, and English Language and Literature at Broward Community College, Florida. He is the author of two books of poetry: *Apple* (1999) and *Organic Forms* (2007). *Apple* won the Bulgarian National Award Yuzhna Prolet for best debut poetry collection.

Brian Bergstrom is a doctoral graduate student in the East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department at the University of Chicago. Currently based in Montreal, Canada, he is completing a project examining representations of youthful criminals in contemporary Japanese literature and popular culture.

Frances Bingham's poetry, short stories and non-fiction have been published in anthologies, reviews and magazines; her edition of Valentine Ackland's *Selected Poems* is forthcoming from Carcanet. She lives in London with Liz Mathews, studio potter and lettering artist; they work together on projects such as their artists' book *Mother tongue*.

Nicole Brossard writes and lives in Montréal. Poet, novelist and essayist, twice Governor General winner for her poetry, Brossard has published more than thirty books. Many have been translated into English. In 1991, she was awarded le Prix Athanase-David. She won the W.O. Mitchell 2003 Prize and the Canadian Council of Arts Molson Prize in 2006. Her work has been also been translated into Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese, Slovenian, Romanian, Catalan and other languages.

Kathleen Bryson, author of the novels *Mush* and *Girl on a Stick*, received her BA in Swedish from the University of Washington in 1992, and was the co-winner of that year's Peterson Scholarship. She lived three years in Stockholm, where she studied Archaeology at Stockholms Universitet. Her first feature film, *The Viva Voce Virus*, will be finished this year.

Chris Campe writes: "I was born in 1979 and drawing is the only thing I kept doing even though it never came out the way I wanted it to. It's getting better, though." See more at queeristics.de.

Jacek Dehnel was born in Gdansk in 1980. In 2005 he was one of the youngest ever winners of Poland's annual Koscielski Prize for promising new writers. He wrote his PhD on Polish translations of Philip Larkin, some of whose poetry, along with other English poets, Dehnel has translated himself. He has published four volumes of his own poetry. He is also a painter, and presents an arts programme on Polish television. In 2006 he published his first novel, *Lala*. A collection of short stories, *The Marketplace in Smyrna*, appeared in 2007. He lives in Warsaw.

Jesus Encinar is a Spanish entrepreneur whose companies include Idealista.com, Floresfrescas.com, and 11870.com, as well as the publishing house Desatada, dedicated to publishing gay poetry in Spanish. His first book of poems, *¿qué querías decir cuando decías que me amabas?*, is forthcoming in 2008. He lives in Madrid.

Zizi Fareesheh is a visual artist and a writer. She uses a pseudonym because she is still afraid, and also because she wishes to bring her drag queen self out of the closet. The name is a small step. Zizi lives in Amman, Jordan

Linda France works as a poet, tutor and editor, based in Northumberland. Her five poetry collections are published by Bloodaxe Books, including *The Simultaneous Dress* (2002) and *The Toast of the Kit Cat Club* (2005). She edited the acclaimed anthology *Sixty Women Poets* (1993). Linda is currently writing fiction.

Olivia Heal sprung from the north Norfolk marshes. She set off to study languages in Dublin, and to later trail around Latin America. She then stopped off in France, where she has since been working as a translator, and is currently doing a Masters degree in feminine and gender studies at Paris.

John Hobbs has held and contributed to many exhibitions, and has his photographs published in various publications. He's

a passionate photographer, fascinated by the beauty of graphic and simple subjects and the delicacy of the human experience. He lives in Vauxhall, South London and can be reached at j.hobbs2@btinternet.com.

Tomoyuki Hoshino was born in 1965 in Los Angeles, but grew up in Japan. Hoshino made his debut with the 1997 Bungei Award-winning novel, *Saigo no toiki* (*The Last Gasp*). Hoshino is one of the most critically recognized Japanese writers of his generation, earning many more awards, including the Noma and Mishima. He is also an avid soccer fan and amateur player whose commentaries on the game and the politics that surround it have attracted a following independent of his fiction. See more at hoshinot.jp.

Lotte Inuk has published more than a dozen books and many stories. In 1993 she was awarded a Danish Ministry of Culture prize for her trilogy of novels, *Regina*. The excerpt here, *Ice Age*, is translated from her most recent novel, about the life of a young woman in Greenland.

Åsa Johannesson is based in London and currently completing a Masters in Photography at the Royal College of Art. "Photography, for me, is a tool for self-exploration. When selecting my sitters I look for qualities that reflect aspects of myself. They become a type of mirror and, more specifically, I feel, reflect the person that others perceive me as." See more at asajohannesson.com.

Frans Kellendonk (1951-1990) wrote novels, short stories and essays, translated English-language classics (including Emily Brontë, Henry James and Wyndham Lewis) and for five years edited a leading literary journal, *De Revisor*. Published in 1986, *Mystiek Lichaam* (*The Body Mystic*) was his last novel.

Thomas E. Kennedy has published over 20 books, amongst them the four novels of *The Copenhagen Quartet* (2002-05). In 2007 a new novel, *A Passion in the Desert*, and story collection, *Cast Upon the Day*, appeared. He is currently guest-editing a Danish issue of *The Literary Review*. For more, see thomasekennedy.com.

Menis Koumantareas was born in Athens. He has written sixteen books of fiction – including *Motorbikes*, *Vest No. 9*, *The Glass Industry* – a number of which have won the National Book Prize, while others were made into films. He is a founding member of the Greek Writers' Guild. "The Bells" is from his collection, *The Flying Woman*, which won the Thiavazo Book Prize in 2007.

Sophie Lewis is a journalist, translator and associate of Dalkey Archive Press. Her translation of Marcel Aymé's *La Belle Image* appears in February as *Beautiful Image* (Pushkin Press). She was born in London and still lives there.

Timothy Liu is the author of six books of poems, most recently *Of Thee I Sing* and *For Dust Thou Art*. He lives in Manhattan.

Antonia Lloyd-Jones is a translator and writer. Her most recent translations from Polish include *Castorp* by Pawel Huelle (*Serpent's Tail*) and *Catharsis* by Andrzej Szczeklik (Chicago UP). Her translation of *Mercedes-Benz* by Pawel Huelle was shortlisted for the *Independent Foreign Fiction Award*.

W. Martin has translated books by Natasza Goerke and Emil Kästner and published numerous translations from Polish and German in magazines. He is a former editor of *Chicago Review*, a 2008 recipient of the NEA Fellowship for Translation, and lives and teaches in Chicago.

Andrew May moved to the Netherlands in 1990. Besides pulling beers and pursuing sideroads into journalism that included a couple of years feeding the newswires, he's been translating from Dutch and French for the last decade, specialising in art, music and architecture, with occasional ventures into the literary domain.

Randa Mirza is a visual artist based in Lebanon. She works with digital photography and live video editing. Her latest works reflect on

wars and postwar situations; what is shown and hidden during warfare, but also what remains, transforms or changes, gets forgotten, or disappears after a conflict. Randa was born in Beirut in 1978.

Brane Mozetic is a Slovenian poet, writer, translator and editor. He has published ten collections of poems and three fiction books, and has been awarded the City of Ljubljana Poetry Prize and the European Poetry Prize-Falgwe. He has translated Rimbaud, Foucault, and Brossard, amongst others, into Slovenian. He has two books in English translation: poems *Butterflies* (Spuyten Duyvil Press) and short stories *Passion* (Talisman House).

Rachid O. was born in Rabat. He studied in Marrakech before moving to Paris. His books include *L'Enfant ébloui* (1995), *Plusieurs vies* (1996), *Chocolat chaud* (1998) and *Ce qui reste* (2003).

Simon Phillips is a freelance photographer based in London. He specialises in documenting the alternative/queer/tranny scene. His commercial shoots have appeared in Time Out, Metro, Boyz and the Guardian. As a fine art photographer he has exhibited in a number of solo and group shows worldwide. Go to: simonphillips.org.uk.

Nina Rapi is an award-winning playwright and short story writer. Her plays include *Lovers*, *Angelstate*, *Edgewise*, *Dreamhouse*, and *Ithaka*. Her first collection of short stories, *Nine Traces in a Circle*, was published in 2006. Her work has been seen in the UK, the USA, India, Italy and Greece. She is the editor of BRAND literary magazine.

Lawrence Schimel is the author or anthologist of over 80 books, including the poetry collection *Fairy Tales for Writers*, and the anthologies *Best Gay Poetry 2008*, *First Person Queer*, and *The Mammoth Book of New Gay Erotica*. He has published translations of poems by Luis Martinez de Merlo, Luis Antonio de Villena, Luis Cremades, and Leopoldo Alas, among others. He lives in Madrid.

Erinç Seymen was born in 1980 in Istanbul, where he lives and works. He has a degree in Painting and is now completing an

MA in Art & Design at Yildiz Technical University. In holds regular solo shows at Galerist in Istanbul, and has participated in group shows there and in Izmir, Berlin, Athens, and Vienna, amongst other places. In 2007 he opened his solo project in Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, and in Helsinki at the Finnish Museum of Photography. He writes occasionally for magazines such as art-ist and Siyahi, and collaborates with the queer organisation Lambdaistanbul. A catalogue of his work and an essay written by Erden Kosova was published by Galerist in 2005.

Edith Södergran died of tuberculosis in 1923. She was thirty-one years old. Her free-style poetry was disparaged during her short lifetime, but she is now regarded as the parent of Finno-Swedish modernism. Södergran was born in St. Petersburg, educated in German, and was a member of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. She wrote her most passionate poetry for another woman, the poet and critic Hagar Olsson.

Arnold de Vos published in Dutch before leaving the Netherlands and is the author of *Merore o Un amore senza impiego* and of *Vertigo. 77 poesie per Ahmed Safeer*. His collection of poetry, *Nakedness Is Your Priestly Robe* is due in out in 2008 by Gradiva Publications.

Michal Witkowski, with his 2005 novel *Lubiewo*, single-handedly changed the shape of queer literature – and queer culture – in Poland. He is the author of two other books, the recipient of various prestigious awards, and the host of his own TV show. *Lubiewo* has been translated into more than a dozen languages and will be published in English in 2009 by Portobello Books.


Monique Wittig (1935–2003) was one of the founders of the Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF) (Women's Liberation Movement). She moved from Paris to the United States in 1976. Her books include *L'Opoponax* (1964, prix Médicis), *Les Guérillères*, *Corps Lesbien*, *Virgile, non* (1985) (translated as *Across the Acheron*), *La pensée straight* and *Paris-la-Politique* (1999).

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Chroma

Chroma's 2nd International Queer Writing Competition for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans writers

judges

Stella Duffy • Robert Glück • Betsy Warland • Sarah Waters

DEADLINE: 1 SEPTEMBER 2008

Categories and Prizes:

Short Story Prize

1st - £300, 2nd - £150, 3rd - £75

Poetry Prize

1st - £300, 2nd - £150, 3rd - £75

The Transfabulous Short Story Prize

£200 for the best short story by a trans writer

The Velvet Flash Fiction Prize

£200 for the best short story up to 150 words

all winning stories will be published in *Chroma*

2 UK winners will appear at Homotopia, Liverpool's annual celebration of Queer Culture

- Stella Duffy's novels include *Singling Out the Couples* (1998), *Eating Cake* (1999), *Immaculate Conceit* (2000), *State of Happiness* (2004), and *Parallel Lies* (2005). She has also written five crime novels featuring Private Investigator Saz Martin.
- Robert Glück was named one of the ten best postmodern fiction writers in North America by the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. He is the author of numerous books of poetry and fiction including *Denny Smith* (2003), *Jack the Modernist* (1995), *Margery Kempe* (1994), and *Elements of a Coffee Service* (1982).
- Betsy Warland is one of Canada's leading feminist writers as well as influential innovative writers. Her most recent work is *Only This Blue: A Long Poem with an Essay* (2005). Other works include *HERizons*, *Bloodroot: Tracing the Untelling of Motherloss* (2000), *What Holds Us Here* (1999).
- Sarah Waters is the author of the bestselling novels *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999), which won a Somerset Maugham Award for Lesbian and Gay Fiction and a Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award, *Fingersmith* (2002), and *The Night Watch* (2006).

Rules:

Stories on any subject, in any style, up to 5000 words. Stories submitted to the Velvet Flash Fiction Prize must be no longer than 150 words. Poems on any subject, in any style, up to 50 lines. Entries must be the work of the entrant and must never have been published (including the internet) or broadcast. The entry fee is £5 for each poem or story submitted, payable in £ by cheque, postal order or cash. Cheques must be from a UK bank and made payable to "Chroma" with the sender's name and address on the back. Entries from outside the UK can be paid in cash (notes only) or by cheque from a UK bank: US\$10 or ?10 per entry. Entries must be sent to *Chroma* Writing Competition, PO Box 44655, London N16 0WQ, England. Entries must be in English, typed, single-sided, with pages numbered and stapled. Stories must be double-spaced, and poems – single-spaced. All work will be judged anonymously. Name, address and email address must appear on a separate cover letter along with the title of the story/poem and the category entered into. Entries will not be returned. No corrections after receipt, nor refunds. For acknowledgement of your entry, please enclose a stamped addressed postcard marked Acknowledgement. Prizewinners will be announced in November 2008, and winners' names will be posted onto the *Chroma* website. Worldwide copyright of each entry remains with the author, but *Chroma: A Queer Literary Journal* will have the right to publish the winning poems and stories in the journal and on the *Chroma* website. No competitor may win more than one prize. The judges' decision is final and no individual correspondence can be entered into. Entry implies acceptance of all the rules. Failure to comply with the entry requirements will result in disqualification. Critiques: enclose a further £15 per story/poem (and SAE) if you require a critique of your work. Please write "Critique Required" at the top of the story and ensure correct postage on your entry.

More details at chromajournal.co.uk

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